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**Nationalism, Conflict and Education in the Balkans**

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**Nationalism, Conflict and Education in the Balkans**

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**Thesis**

**Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**in Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements**

**for the Degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December 2014**

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my gratitude to all of the people who helped and supported me during the completion of my thesis. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Mary Neuburger for her guidance, encouragement and support throughout this thesis and my studies in the Communication Studies. Her precious suggestions were a great help for this thesis. Thanks are also given to Dr. Virginia Garrard Burnett for her assistance. I would like to thank my friends at the Dialogue Institute for their encouragement and support. To my family, I extend my appreciation for all the help along the way.

December, 2014

## **Abstract**

### **Nationalism, Conflict and Education in the Balkans**

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The following chapters present a history of the Balkans through the lenses of nationalism, capitalism, racism, violence, war, and the intersectional relationship they all had on the conflict in the Balkans. As this essay dissects each point and relates to the grander scheme of how a relatively peaceful and incredibly diverse people became the subject of intolerance and conflict, this essay will also present possible solutions. The solutions consist of leaning the region back toward the peaceful coexistence it experienced in the past. Education is a primary tool for achieving this ideal. The subject matter and course materials should always be open, without censorship or caveats which present the history of the region inaccurately. An example of this kind of educational movement is the Gulen Movement. Although it is small in scale, the philosophy and ideals behind the movement can serve as a possible stepping stone toward not only peace

in the Balkans, but peace in other conflict affected areas in the world which experience similar hardships.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Nationalism .....	7
The Origins of Nationalism .....	7
Four Paradigms of Nationalism .....	9
Nationalism and violence as described by Zizek .....	13
Chapter 3: Education in the Balkans under Post-WWII Communist Rule .....	18
Selective History in the Educational Systems Following WWII .....	18
The Inter-War Era in Yugoslavia .....	19
Legitimizing War as a Cultural Symbol .....	20
Education and Selective Memory Under Communist Rule .....	23
Consequences from the Fall of Communism .....	28
Conclusion .....	33
Chapter 4: Nationalism and Violence in the Balkans .....	35
Balkans .....	35
Rise of Nationalism in the Balkans .....	37
Conflict in the Balkans- before World War-II .....	39
Conflict in the Balkans- during World War-II .....	41
Conflict in the Balkans- After World War-II .....	44
Conflict in the Balkans- after 1990 .....	46
Analysis of the Balkans conflict through the lens of Nationalism .....	49
Chapter 5: The Gülen Movement: Peace through Education in the Balkans .....	55
Introduction .....	55
The Gülen Movement and Gülen's Views on Dialogue and Education .....	56
Historical Framework of the Conflict .....	59
The Conflict's Effect on Education .....	67

Contributions of the Gülen Movement in the Balkans .....	68
Improving Future Inquiry .....	73
Conclusion .....	77
Chapter 6: Conclusion of the Study .....	79
References .....	89
Vita .....	95



## **List of Figures**

<b>FIGURE 1. PICTURES FROM INTERNET SHOWING TITO BEING DRESSED IN MILITARY UNIFORMS</b>	<b>29</b>
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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The following chapters present a history of the Balkans through the lenses of nationalism, capitalism, racism, violence, war, and the intersectional relationship they all had on the conflict in the Balkans. As this essay dissects each point and relates to the grander scheme of how a relatively peaceful and incredibly diverse people became the subject of intolerance and conflict, this essay will also present possible solutions. The solutions consist of leaning the region back toward the peaceful coexistence it experienced in the past. Education is a primary tool for achieving this ideal. The subject matter and course materials should always be open, without censorship or caveats which present the history of the region inaccurately. An example of this kind of educational movement is the Gulen Movement. Although it is small in scale, the philosophy and ideals behind the movement can serve as a possible stepping stone toward not only peace in the Balkans, but peace in other conflict affected areas in the world which experience similar hardships.

A framework for how the Balkans destabilized into the violence seen in the last several decades must be devised in order to understand its problems and provide the proper solutions and eventually peace. Nation-states have changed dramatically with the rise of global economic systems along with the depletion and competition over limited natural resources. Control over these resources have always been a point of contention when dealing with international politics and the emerging economic systems of modern times. But this is not a new trend. Just as important to the control of natural resources are the means with which those resources travel. Understanding conflict is typically a story of those with power, those who wish to obtain power, those who wish to maintain power, those who fear losing power and all the people caught in between. The story of those

caught between power struggles is far more tragic than the story of power; for these people don't seek power, they simply seek safety.

The history of the Balkan conflict can extend back into the 1200s, where early conflict between the Vatican and emerging sects of Christianity erupted due to the perceived lack of authority the Vatican had in the more mountainous and isolated regions of the Balkans. This is emblematic of the future conflict that occurred in the Balkans in the modern era. Outside forces that see the Balkans as a valuable commodity vie for control of the region against other foreign forces and even against its own people. In order to gain control, one must first fabricate consent. One way of doing this is with the ideological repression apparatus of nationalism. Nationalism is a multifaceted term which ties into the social, racial, and ethnic identities of people, how all these aspects tie into one another and how they are all linked to forming a national identity.

Larger and increasing numbers of Diasporas have made the national, cultural, and ethnic identity of many people in the region nebulous, floating formlessly in a stirred and tumultuous cloud of dust.

The second chapter of this essay includes working definitions of nationalism and how they became such a prominent part of society. It looks through the lens of nationalism as one tied inherently to notions of identity with an historical, societal, and symbolic framework. Many people form their concept of identity, autonomy and community through their nationality. Later in the chapter Slavoj Zizek presents an intersection of nationalism, capitalism and violence, an intersection rooted in institutional racism, economic inclusion and exclusion and direct physical forms of violence and intimidation.

The history of imperialism and colonialism should also be part of the discussion of the use of systemic and institutional racism as a method of control and

dehumanization. It is argued that ideological and institutional repression apparatus has evolved in the modern age into a much more “objective, system [and] anonymous” entity that’s influence is spread over far too many aspects of societal living. This is a pertinent notion when considering Nazism and the invasion and division of the Balkans under their occupation. The methods of propaganda the Nazis used are emblematic of racism, fascism and ethnic division of in-groups and out-groups that plagued the region of years to come and erupted in violence in the 1990s.

In chapter three, a specific aspect of the institutional racism instilled in the population of Yugoslavia following WWII is presented. The ruling party did this by creating a selective history of Yugoslavia through the educational system. By infecting the educational system with notions of fascism and racism, violence becomes justified and what would otherwise be a history of peaceful coexistence is warped into a history of occupation, conflict between the minority and majority, the glorification of the military and war-heroes, and demonization of dissenters and peace-lovers. Josip Tito is one such leader depicted as a war-hero despite the fact that many historians and accounts look to his regime more enigmatically both in terms of how supported, dissented or remained aloof regarding ethnic violence.

The three ethnic groups looked at in this chapter include Serbs, Croats and Slovenes although group distinctions in this regard are somewhat inadequate due to the inter-cultural exchanges that occurred within this region prior to the influence of communism and later fascism. As communism rose to power, the history books conveniently excluded the methods used in order to obtain said power. As with any usurping of authority from one legitimate entity to another, the former authority must be demonized and displayed as inferior, inadequate and incompetent. The violent and brutal taking of power was also extricated from the historical as if it never happened. Education

is also seen as a privilege which leads to the older generation's adherence to whatever is taught in schools while the younger generation is encouraged to do well to learn the lessons taught. It should be noted that education in itself is not the cause of intolerance and ignorance, but rather the content and subject matter taught through the educational system that was controlled and contorted to fit a representation of history that favored, supported and justified the ruling party.

Chapter four presents a more consolidated history of conflict in the Balkans. Remaining in the lens of power, authority and fear which intertwine into ideas of national identity, the Balkans initially presented as a unique melting pot of cultural exchange. Situated between the East and West and serving as a central hub of commerce exposed the region to significant surges of diversity. However, due the importance of the region as a trade route, whoever controlled this region would thus control the trade.

An early history presents the Catholic Church's attempts to delegitimize the Bosnian Church that existed in more isolated regions of the Balkans. The specific history of the region becomes riddled with entities struggling for power and authority of the region from the Byzantine Empire to Ottoman into Communism and Globalization. The details regarding these power struggles have either been lost or distorted to make for a case study, but it should be noted that these conflicts aren't necessarily the result of religious or cultural difference, but rather the way nationalism and identity is used to create divisions in people that otherwise wouldn't have existed. Violence in the later 1800s into the 1900s are better documented in scale although the details are still left undocumented.

Another aspect of the conflict that erupted in this time frame is the invasions of foreign powers including Nazi Germany and Communist Russia and the lingering influences these occupations had on the national, cultural, and racial sentiments of the

region. Nazism brought fascism and racism as well as the tools to utilize these ideas as effective methods of control. Communism brought about class conflict and the association of wealth disparity and racial inferiority. Communism also brought an “any means necessary” mentality to the idea of civic duty to the nation-state as well as the subjugation of the individual to the larger whole.

The effects of history is one of longstanding turmoil, deep-seeded national sentiments that are rooted in racism and division. Peace agreements and ceasefires serve only as exercises in the formal albeit futile attempt to resolve the armed conflict. However, due to the nature and history of this conflict, documents simply stating that one entity will not provoke the other entity into physical violence is insufficient. Because the nature of this conflict is an ideological one, it cannot be redressed through arrangements that affect the physical bodies involved, but should focus on the psychological and ideological disposition of all parties involved. One such attempt to bring about this reconciliation is the Gulen Movement. Started by Fethullah Gulen from whom the movement derives its namesake, although Gulen himself would rather not be attributed with the title of the movement, the Gulen Movement is an attempt to bring about the peaceful coexistence of different cultures, ethnicities, races, and genders through education, open dialogue and service.

The last several decades of conflict has not only displaced the educators and students, but forced them underground to pursue knowledge through unofficial means. The Gulen Movement aims at providing a safe haven for those who seek knowledge through private institutions. Gulen inspired schools all focus on empathy, holistic education, and cross-cultural dialogue. While Gulen himself hails from Turkey, the effects of Gulen Movement and the ideology that it promotes has extended to Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, The Philippines, Banda Aceh, Northern Iraq, Southern Turkey and

other war torn areas. All of these places are associated with long histories of colonialism, imperialism, racial and class division, but are also considered to be unsolicited wells of anthropological diversity.

Because the Gulen Movement focuses on teaching the future generations and instilling values of tolerance, ethics, and strong analytical skills to individuals at grassroots level, it is hard to find empirical evidence that can be attributed to the Movement as a whole. Much of the critique of the movement focuses on the works and writings of Gulen himself and what exactly it is that he is trying to do.

The chapters in this essay present a historical framework for the reader to understand the issues that have influenced the area. It is problematic to look at any particular factor that can be attributed as the primary cause of conflict and violence, however an intersectional approach is the attempt to bring light to the situation and bring about the peaceful and non-violent reconciliation of a divided people.

## **Chapter 2: Nationalism**

The Balkans, historically, have been a land of great diversity, both religious and cultural. For hundreds of years, the region has been shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews, who lived in relative peace during the 15th through 18th centuries. But as the Ottoman Empire's influence faded and Europe's influence grew, a power vacuum was left in the region. But beyond mere military and governmental presence, the ideologies of the West, in particular those of nationalism, communism, and fascism spread to the Balkans, leading to strong and violent shifts in governmental control and diversity. While communism and fascism's influence have faded away, the recent Balkan war shows how the ideology of nationalism continues to live on, both motivating and controlling political power and violence in the Balkans. The destabilization caused by nationalism has left behind a more homogenous and separated population in the region, diminishing diversity and disrupting its formerly pluralistic multiethnic heritage. Finding a way to disrupt the currents of separatist nationalism will prove crucial to preventing a repetition of the violence the region has experienced so often in the last century.

### **THE ORIGINS OF NATIONALISM**

Nationalism is a modern term which was first used by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder and the French cleric, the Abbe Augustin de Barruel in the late 1700s.<sup>1</sup> Defining the term, however, is not as simple as finding its first recorded use. The historian Anthony D. Smith presents a working definition: "an ideology that places the



nation at the center of its concerns and seeks to promote the nation's well-being...[specifically] furthering national autonomy, national unity and national identity.”<sup>2</sup> However, this national identity shifts over time, location, and between different groups of people, thus allowing for nationalism to take on sharply different meanings even within the same country.

Across these various settings, different factors drive the collective understanding and influence of nationalism. Given its various roles and our growing understanding of nationalism, it is impossible to describe with a single, uniform methodology. However, there are consistent traits and recurring themes that help us identify the evolution and impact of this extremely influential concept. Importantly, each interpretation of nationalism relies on a national identity whose goals are advanced, which in turn benefits the goals of the perceived nation.<sup>3</sup> However, in the pursuit of these ends, the identity shifts, as it “is not static but something that is constantly shaped and reconstructed”.<sup>4</sup> Even within the same nation and time period, national identity can differ from group to group as different ideas, ideals, and in-groups shape the shared beliefs inherent to nationalism.<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is not possible to come up with one universal definition of nationalism.

Since the French Revolution, the forces of nationalism have become increasingly prevalent in political and social spheres. Regular public education regarding the nation itself, with the intent to improve the nation's power and welfare, began only after this

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010) 5.

<sup>2</sup> Smith 9.

<sup>3</sup> Smith 10.

period and for the last two centuries nationalism has been a dominant feature of society and politics. In each interpretation of nationalism, the ideological focus has been on in groups that comprise the idealized nation and out groups that do not. When forced into conflict, nationalism can lead these in groups to harm or exclude out groups, either in the form of quick flashes of physical violence and war or in the form of gradual discriminatory behavior and policies.<sup>6</sup> Among political ideologies, nationalism is nearly unmatched in terms of power and popular appeal. Few conceptual symbols have had such resilience and influence throughout history. But nationalism goes beyond the ideological and into the realm of shared and developing culture. To describe this complex role, Smith makes distinctions between four paradigmatic approaches to the study of nationalism: modernism, perennialism, primordialism, and ethno-symbolism.

#### **FOUR PARADIGMS OF NATIONALISM**

The modernist paradigm of the study of nationalism identifies nationalistic rhetoric and identity as a phenomenon arising after the French Revolution. Adherents argue that, prior to 1789, an ideology unifying a people of common history and culture, and with shared goals, simply did not exist. The concept of a national civic body, or of educating a population to produce a particular citizenry that would serve a nation's goals, was a post-Revolution innovation.<sup>7</sup> Within the realm of modernist thought, Smith has distinguished five common facets of discourse. The first, associated with Michael Hechter and Tom Nairn, draws a line of causality between the social holes resultant of

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<sup>4</sup> Guy, Will. "Romani Identity and Post-Communist Policy." *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Ed. Guy, Will. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2002. 3-33.

<sup>5</sup> Mazower, Mark. *Salonica, City of Ghosts*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 261-263.

<sup>6</sup> Neuberger, The Orient Within. 7

capitalism and the rise of nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Another discourse, associated with Gellner, links modernization (including social mobility, compulsory education, and print media) to the rise of nationalism.<sup>9</sup> The third facet, the “political” component, connects nationalism to the rise of the modern nation state composed of professionals.<sup>10</sup> The fourth facet identifies modern philosophical factors, including ideals of autonomy, identity, and community, as being integral to the recent nationalistic trend.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the “constructionist” theory of Eric Hobsbawm, and further developed by Benedict Anderson, interprets the rise of nationalism as resulting from the manipulation by elites of the masses, in order to instill certain values and, in doing so, circumvent possible political upheaval.<sup>12</sup>

Perennialism, the second paradigm of nationalism, represents the view that nations have existed for the last few thousand years of human history. Perennialists fall into two camps, one arguing that some nations can trace their political, ethnic, or cultural roots back hundreds or thousands of years, and the other arguing that the concept of nationhood has existed for even longer still. This analysis allows for the creation of new nations, and for the development of old or existing ones. It also allows for the development of nationhood over time. Similarly, this view allowed for the development of a form of social evolution, whereby different nations competed with each other over time, a view more popular before the developments of World War II. While this approach

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<sup>7</sup> Smith 49.

<sup>8</sup> Smith 51.

<sup>9</sup> Smith 51.

<sup>10</sup> Smith 52.

<sup>11</sup> Smith 52

was formerly one of the most popular among academics, it has fallen out of favor and is presently has far less support than the modernist view.<sup>13</sup>

The third paradigm, primordialism, views nations as a sort of starting state of humankind, either in biological form as ‘national’ organisms or as ‘cultural givens’, separating groups of humans from each other based on shared language and culture. Social scientists such as Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils are two prominent supporters of these views. Primordialists assert that there is nothing ‘modern’ in the creation of national identity, but rather that ethno-national ties have existed throughout history. They emphasize the distinction between these ties and cooperation and collective behavior based on the civil order. Rather than a new ideological concept, primordialists view nationalism as a continuation of the ancient tendency for humans to form cooperative groups, often based on common ancestry and kinship. This perspective helps explain the importance of ethnic ties in splintering or defining national identity, but does not limit itself to ethnic ties. The theory instead analyzes nationalism as a basic human tool used to establish and justify cooperative behavior in spite of a clear lack of biological or family-based connections.<sup>14</sup> However, this paradigm fails to explain the role of personal interaction with nationalism, such as why one form of nationalism is more appealing than another. Considering nationalism as an irresistible political tool may allow for easier study, but it limits the range of understanding, removing the personal and individual,

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<sup>12</sup> Smith 52

<sup>13</sup> Smith 53

<sup>14</sup> Smith 53

elements whose understanding is perhaps the most important for those hoping to affect the harmful influence of this ideology.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth paradigm, developed in part by Smith himself, is ethno-symbolism. Attempting to rectify the discrepancies between paradigms that view nationalism only through the lenses of continuity or change, ethno-symbolism emphasizes the sentiments, values, myths, and collective history held subjectively by a particular people. Rather than favoring the elites as does constructionist theory or primordialism, ethno-symbolism places a special importance on the common masses and their shared culture. Additionally, it recognizes the importance of historical factors in the shaping of nationalism, such as loyalties and “old” cultural identities.<sup>16</sup> Smith rejects the notion that nationalism is the result of manipulation by elites. Instead, he and ethno-symbolists emphasize the problem of what exactly appeals to people about nationalism and in particular its ties to ethnic history. Additionally, despite the academic trend of discrediting modern nationalism as a dying expression of culture, Smith has maintained that nationalism is a powerful political and social force, as has been shown in recent global events, particularly in its ability to develop new nations and national identities based on existing ethnic communities.

While perennialism and primordialism serve as important historical tools for analysis and offer broad predictive possibilities, they are far less useful from the perspective of those hoping to change nationalism’s effects in a particular place. Modernism presents a broader array of tools of analysis, and breaks down into smaller

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<sup>15</sup> Smith 60

<sup>16</sup> Smith 63

subgroups of theories. But this degree of specificity is only allowed by taking nationalism as an inevitable consequence of the modern world.<sup>17</sup> This approach offers little insight into seeking ways to change or affect nationalism and its effects. The ethno-symbolist paradigm, by contrast, provides a means to understand what draws individuals to these ideas. However, the broad political perspectives of modernism and primordialism are still quite useful as a tool to see how nationalism leads to violence and ethnic strife. But once these systems are created, viewing them as an inevitable effect of modern society or human history offers little hope for changing the problems of modern life. However, the currents of nationalism today still lead to violence and strife between ethnic and national groups. To better understand this, it is helpful to consider a nuanced definition of violence.

#### **NATIONALISM AND VIOLENCE AS DESCRIBED BY ŽIŽEK**

Slavoj Žižek presents an interpretation of nationalism as it intertwines with capitalism to form a dangerous and influential trend in the modern world. Žižek identifies three varieties of violence in his book on the subject: subjective, objective, and systemic. Subjective violence includes direct, physical violence such as terrorist or criminal acts. Objective violence uses symbolic or political structures to harm individuals or groups, and includes the effects and application of racism or discriminatory practices. Systemic violence, the least recognized but most damaging form, can only be seen in the end results of economic and political systems.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Smith 53

<sup>18</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence*. (New York: Picador, 2008) 2.

Žižek argues that the rise of Western capitalism and media have created a new wave of “fundamental systemic violence, much more uncanny than any direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence.” This violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their “evil” intentions, but is purely “objective, systemic, anonymous”<sup>19</sup>. Žižek suggests that Western national ideals exemplify capitalist free markets to such a degree that they justify systemic violence, allowing crippling levels of poverty and wealth disparity, justified through national goals of economic well-being of the nation as a whole. This may seem a far cry from the most infamous form of Western nationalism, of the German Nazi party during World War II, but the connections to national well-being become more apparent when viewed through the lens of fear.

In Western media, there is a powerful focus on subjective violence, that of neighborhood crime or terrorism. But there is far less attention paid to systemic violence such as high incarceration rates or foreign civilian casualties from military actions, in spite of radically higher numbers of victims. Politicians escalate this focus on subjective violence, tying it to perceived national values and turning those nationalist aims into a shield against ever-inflated fears of immigrants, crime, immoral behavior, or even the state itself.

The political discourse that arises from this focus fits well into the concept of nationalism, as national well-being and safety begin to crowd out the “very constitutive dimension of the political,” justifying virtually any political means. The lesson is thus

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<sup>19</sup> Žižek 12-13

that one should resist the fascination of subjective violence, of violence enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, and fanatical crowds: subjective violence is just the most visible of the three. Systemic violence, the form of violence most often perpetrated on the grounds of a nationalist agenda, has proven to be the most dangerous form of violence since the rise of nationalism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. At its most extreme, systemic violence against a particular group can combine with nationalist fervor in the form of ethnic cleansing.

Žižek's discussion of anti-Semitism, in particular, lends itself to a study of nationalism. He points to the need for indoctrination, culturally or educationally, to justify vicious feelings of hatred toward Jews. As he notes, the figure of the "Jew" that exploited workers, seduced daughters, and manipulated the presses<sup>20</sup> is culturally constructed and circulated by traditional tales, and it is this fictitious figure that is the target of violence and hatred, rather than the actual reality of Jews.<sup>21</sup> Anti-Semitism originated from Europe initially based on religious differences. During this time converted Jews were accepted into Christian societies without a problem. However, after the rise of nationalism, anti-Semitism outgrew its religious origins and merged with fears of and for national power, resulting in a much more harmful form of intolerance.

Nationalism's rise and fall in the public discourse cannot ignore the history of the Nazi party and early 20<sup>th</sup> and late 19<sup>th</sup> century European imperialism. During this time, a combination of Social Darwinism and nationalism was used to justify the invasions of

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<sup>20</sup> Žižek 99



foreign lands and the subjugation of millions by western powers.<sup>22</sup> With nations viewed as individuals in a do or die competition for future survival and well-being, western powers (and a few others, such as the Japanese during World War II) parceled up foreign territories and trade routes, using all varieties of political and ideological tools to ensure that theirs would be the country fit enough to survive and to justify their government's actions to an increasingly influential and educated citizenry. Foreign lands were tapped for natural resources, as trade routes and alliances formed to ensure continued national prosperity. The advent of communication technologies, such as the printing press, radio, and telegraph, combined with industrialization allowed this process to take on a symbolic and physical scale that would have previously been unimaginable. The power of this ideology was made manifest in the conflict between fascism and communism, particularly that of Hitler's Germany. At this point, a powerful propaganda machine used new technologies of the radio and microphone to merge the ideas of nationalism with genetic Darwinism, mobilizing one of the world's most powerful nations towards war and conquest. But more than just war, the forces of nationalism can be most clearly seen in the case of Nazism to foment and hone the systemic violence of nationalism to a brutal weapon used to justify ethnic cleansing.

In the wake of the tragic events of World War II, the term nationalism experienced a decline in its popular appeal and common use, as did the most obvious forms of systemic violence that had been so closely tied to nationalist and racist rhetoric.

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<sup>21</sup> Žižek 66-67

<sup>22</sup> Claeys, Gregory. *The 'Survival of the Fittest' and the Origins of Social Darwinism*. Journal of the History of Ideas 61 (2000): 223-240.

In particular, modern nations are much less likely to invade foreign lands for the purpose of growing their own territories, and when doing so now often seek international approval and support before acting. Nations are also quite careful to avoid the racial ideology of the Nazis so as to avoid the international condemnation that would come with it. But just as the overt imperialism of the two World Wars shifted into the uneasy chess match of the Cold War, nationalism too has morphed into a subtler but still influential force in local and international politics. In particular, the nationalist vision of conquest and international control has largely died out or at least gone underground. But many of the same goals and actions are now justified by a new ideology that each nation should pursue its own well-being above that of others.

Combined with a view of international politics as a zero-sum game, where one nation's success causes another's decline, the most aggressive brands of this 'realpolitik' can be hard to distinguish from the nationalist motivations of earlier years. In order to maintain their safety, even economically, nations can easily justify wars fought in foreign lands. New economic tools, such as sanctions, have also been developed and employed to further enable nations to push their own agenda. In the minds of local citizens, the back and forth of political conflict has become tied to feelings of national pride, security, sovereignty, and disenfranchisement in a new type of nationalism. The dangers of this modern nationalism, and its ties to the historical forces and ideas of the past, can be clearly seen in the case of the Balkan War of the early 1990s, the most violent conflict Europe has seen in the last several decades.

## **Chapter 3: Education in the Balkans under Post-WWII Communist Rule**

### **SELECTIVE HISTORY IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS FOLLOWING WWII**

Previous chapters have explored the ways in which nationalism has often stood as a obstacle to peaceful coexistence and tolerance in the lands of the former Ottoman Empire; one of our world's most culturally diverse regions. In the context of peace-building, academics have observed that nationalistic sentiments have provided a distraction from important issues shared by members of all cultures, and such distractions have the potential to go as far as to generate intercultural violence.<sup>23</sup>

In this understanding of the influence of nationalism, rather than pursuing a common good, different cultural groups are instead pitted against each other, fueled by assertions of cultural superiority and privilege. The tragic history of post-Tito regime Yugoslavia provides an example of the negative impact on the belief of nationalism in the form of cultural supremacy. Such detrimental effects are possibly best observed through Yugoslavia's educational system which is observed by many academics as a possible contributor to the eruption of violence in the country following the fall of the Tito regime.<sup>24</sup> It is argued in much of the literature surrounding this issue that the selective history presented by Yugoslavia's educational system following WWII presents an

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<sup>23</sup> Lampe 71

<sup>24</sup> Georgeoff 444

example of how refusal to embrace cultural diversity not only hinders general peace-building, but can also inhibit the development of an intellectually healthy, forward-thinking future generation.

### **THE INTER-WAR ERA IN YUGOSLAVIA**

The kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, founded in December of 1918, never achieved its expected success. Historians understand that this state grew out of Yugoslavism, a system developed in the 1800s by Croats which quickly grew in popularity among the Serbs and Slovenes. The term Yugoslavism has no historically agreed upon definition. In short, the concept encouraged unity among the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, living together in one state. Those promoting Yugoslavism believed that if the three nations were left separate, they would be left open to subjugation by their neighbors with greater military strength. However, it was argued that if united, these three peoples would afford themselves greater freedom in developing their own governmental and legal systems. While the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes all agreed that banding together would be of mutual benefit, there was not any agreement as to what form their new and sovereign government would take, such as whether it should take the form of a centralized or federalized power structure. Despite a lack of planning the specifics, it was assumed that the kingdom would field a unified army and the region would adopt unified foreign and trade policies. Apart from these shared goals for the kingdom, each sub-nation was expected to retain authority over local municipalities in regards to such issues as education, religious policies and law enforcement. However, in order for this new shared nation to be a success, the belief that Serbs, Croats, and

Slovenes were in essence one people had to receive overwhelmingly popular support.<sup>1</sup> While most intellectuals living in the region at this time accepted this idea, by 1920 it became clear that the majority of the population did not share the resolve for unity shown by the intellectual community. For many historians, this attempt to force unity in the region led to civil conflict during World War II as the culmination of the fact that cultural unity, as conceived in the nineteenth century, was never accepted by the South Slavs in the interwar period.<sup>25</sup>

### **LEGITIMIZING WAR AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL**

Valorizing the actions of soldiers is a complex issue in many cultures. The trope of the strong, heroic soldier has been and continues to be a common character archetype in film and other popular media. The resulting glorification of violence encourages veneration of violent conflict. Such depictions of wartime were common during and in the wake of WWII, portrayed by many as a war fought between the forces of good and evil. Such a simplification of the complexity of the WWII conflict can be expected from the entertainment media, but it is dangerous when such a simplification is able to infiltrate a more broad cultural consciousness. According to some historians, post-WWII Yugoslavia provides an example of the full realization of this possibility.

It has been observed that following WWII, the victorious Communist Party took steps to consolidate their rule by promoting a communism-centric form of nationalism through a "selective memory" of the country's past. The ruling party recognized the historic diversity in the region and feared that this diversity would result in a difficulty to

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<sup>25</sup> Jelavich 610

maintain a central authority. The resulting promotion of communist propaganda became so pervasive that it even penetrated the country's educational systems which are evidenced to have been teaching the cultural superiority of communism and the glorification of war.<sup>26</sup> The extent of such ubiquitous propaganda in Yugoslavia is expected to have contributed to inflicting lasting harm on the development of intercultural tolerance in the region.

The Yugoslavian region was certainly no stranger to warfare. As a result, well before WWII, the education system in Yugoslavia did much to legitimize war as a cultural symbol. As Hoepken has observed, "wars, whether victorious or lost, were used by state authorities not just to strengthen national identity but also to transmit officially desired social values and virtues. The traditional patriarchal ethos of heroism in Balkan societies thus merged with the modern nationalist demand for sacrifice in favor of the nation as one of the main objectives of education."<sup>27</sup> A curriculum that promotes such a view of war may seem callous, but in such an historically war-torn region, accepting warfare as an inseparable part of one's national identity is not surprising. However, the goal of such an education was not simply to make warfare seem commonplace, but instead to 1) "show the legitimacy of war to fulfill national interests," and 2) to "present wars as examples from the past of how to behave and how to defend national interests."<sup>28</sup>

The Balkan region does not stand as the only culprit in this type of depiction of war. It was common in schools throughout Europe to find history classes that would skew

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<sup>26</sup> Brown 55

<sup>27</sup> Hoepken 192

facts in order to mold a desired image of the country in question. All of central Europe could be accused of "reducing the depiction of war-related events in the history curricula by purging textbooks of belligerent terminology."<sup>29</sup> However, following the tragedies WWII, most of these countries abandoned glorifying wartime rhetoric and would instead be found promoting intercultural peace and tolerance. The victorious Communist Party, which controlled the Balkan region following WWII, feared losing their hold on countries such as Yugoslavia. Unwilling to relinquish the unifying bond of nationalistic propaganda and war-time solidarity, "a war-centered historical education stubbornly persisted."<sup>30</sup>

The ruling Communist Party had legitimate concerns in regards to the region's volatility. An external, still developing government would be responsible for maintaining order in a region of both substantial cultural diversity and a long history of ethnic conflicts. Communist leaders recognized the degree to which Yugoslavia's people were already indoctrinated to accept war as a cultural symbol. Unlike other regions around the world which were eager to move past the divisions encouraged by WWII, leaders in Yugoslavia aimed to craft the country's collective memory in such a way as to portray the Communist Party's NOVJ (Yugoslav People's Army of Liberation) as protector of the region and to consolidate their rule.<sup>31</sup> Leaders believed that if the events of WWII became the primary source for historic memory and national pride, then Communism would thus be remembered as the country's preferred governmental system and a

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 193

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, 194

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

legitimate ruling party. This notion came from the hope that "remembering the common fight and suffering during the war would help to create consensus in a society that was burdened not only by extreme ethnic, cultural, and religious fragmentation but also by the unfavorable experiences of living together in one state."<sup>32</sup>

### **EDUCATION AND SELECTIVE MEMORY UNDER COMMUNIST RULE**

Following the war, academics have observed that the ruling party knew that they needed to promote their preferred version of history. The educational system provided an ideal medium for transmitting the country's new "history" as educational policy was solely the responsibility of state authorities following WWII.<sup>33</sup> The goal was simple: promote an historical memory that would encourage loyalty to the Communist Party and its political system. This new historical narrative "was structured exclusively around the role of the communist partisans, whose political, military, and moral superiority over all other domestic and foreign actors had to be demonstrated."<sup>34</sup> This was the ruling party's best way to ensure that the upcoming generations in Yugoslavia would have a favorable view of the Communist Party as the manifestation of the values learned in school. However, this doctored perspective was far from an unbiased view of Communism in Yugoslavia as any concerns about the ruling party's use of violence and brutality toward their enemies were "taboo and banned from the official memory."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Georgeoff 446

<sup>32</sup> Hoepken 197

<sup>33</sup> Soljan 141

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Soljan 198



Not surprisingly, it would prove difficult to completely erase any negative memories that citizens retained of WWII era Communist occupation. Keeping individuals from sharing their personal memories and opinions in regards to the new ruling party would be near impossible. Instead, leaders placed their sights on schools so as to completely redefine memories and opinions from an early age, not allowing any room for the development of non "patriotic" values. In the new historical narrative, WWII was used as the primary example for conveying the ideals of patriotism, placing the Communist Party as rescuer of the aching region deeply in need of a unifying regime. This narrative dominated the education system in Yugoslavia where "school programs, textbooks, and teaching at all levels in all subjects had to give priority to the transmission of ideological and so-called patriotic values."<sup>36</sup> The selective memory's resulting Communist "patriotism" continued to be promoted without hindrance well into the 1970s.

Educational institutions provided the ideal medium for indoctrination due to the fact that the Yugoslavian people "placed great trust in the printed word."<sup>37</sup> Families took great pride in the fact that their children were provided the opportunity of an education: an opportunity that many of the parents' generation missed out on. As a result, while an individual may have been untrustworthy of the motives and words of a politician, but textbooks were inherently more trustworthy to the Yugoslavian people. With this trusted platform to present information from, textbooks which described the geography, history, and literature of their nation were also widely used to recount the glories the region's heroes and the hardship his people had endured under foreign rule. Not only textbooks

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<sup>36</sup> Soljan 198

stood as a great tool for overt communication of the ruling party's ideals, but also the role of the teacher cannot be underestimated in their ability to promote a specific version of Yugoslavian history. . Not only where educational instructors presented with the opportunity to instruct the student, but teachers were also able to influence public political attitudes.<sup>38</sup>

While the ruling party's intent was to unify the Yugoslavian people in an effort to consolidate and stabilize their own rule, historians have posited that their promotion of a selective memory had a number of unfavorable effects. First of all, the new historical narrative is believed to have reduced the entirety of the WWII conflict into a simple "us vs. them" conflict. Reviewing educational materials from the period in questions reveals a "description of the war based on a strictly dualistic portrait."<sup>39</sup> Textbooks explain the war being between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries, where the revolutionaries represent good, and the counterrevolutionaries evil. Intercultural strife in Yugoslavia has a deep history of complicated and nuanced conflict. Such subtlety was disregarded by the new selective history, boiling all conflict down to the simple "good vs. evil." Promotion of such a black-and-white, "us vs. them" view of the world is thought to have contributed much to the country's undercurrent of ethnic tension.

Many historians also argue that the Communist Party's selective history of Yugoslavia would also prove dangerous in its tendency to de-ethnicize the Yugoslavian civil war. As was common among communist-controlled regions, the new selective

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<sup>37</sup> Jelavich 603

<sup>38</sup> Jelavich 603

history described the events of WWII from an economic, class-centric perspective, effectively ignoring the true and lasting source of conflict: ethnic tension and violence. Refusing to risk disorder by admitting to nuanced and deep-seeded ethnic conflict, the ruling party chose to ignore Yugoslavia's cultural diversity in an attempt to encourage class-based unity.<sup>40</sup> However, just because the ruling party ignored this unspoken tension, the result was not a relinquishing of ethnic conflict, merely a repression of it. By refusing to acknowledge issues of ethnic tension in Yugoslavia, it was only a matter of time before these intercultural disputes would violently resurface.<sup>41</sup>

However, the Tito-era suppression of ethnic identification in Yugoslavia is not so readily accepted as a detrimental influence on the region from the perspective of former residents of Yugoslavia during this period. It should come as little surprise that there exists a discrepancy in the view of communism's influence on the region when comparing western historians' understanding of Tito's lasting influence and that of the lived experience of growing up in post-WWII Yugoslavia. In interviews conducted with former residents of Yugoslavia during the 60s and 70s, now living in America, these interviews revealed that communist rule under Tito did indeed take extensive measures to quell ethnic diversity through promotion of a unified proletariat. Interviewees recall a country where "undercurrents of ethnic conflict existed, but Tito quickly removed individuals from the country who were observed encouraging any ethnic identification or anti-

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

<sup>40</sup> Lampe 70

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* 85

communist actions."<sup>42</sup> However, interestingly, while academics present this situation as evidence of Tito's lack of willingness to confront inter-ethnic tension and conflict, individuals remember Tito's policies as the best possible approach to providing freedom and prosperity to the Yugoslavian people. One interviewee compared Tito's policies in Yugoslavia to that of the efforts of a father doing everything that he can to maintain a peaceful home in the face of many different children who are often at odds with each other.<sup>43</sup> Many historians paint a picture of ethnic conflict in Yugoslavia allowing to fester under Tito, but in reality, those living under the regime understood some of Tito's more extreme policies as a beneficial, progressive, no-leniency approach to bringing an end to the regions ethnic tensions.<sup>44</sup>

Born of a Croat father and Slovene mother, Tito was in a position to have a unique understanding of the multi-ethnic volatility of his country. Previously the region had been called Greater Serbia as the most pervasive and powerful population group in the region were the Serbs. The founding of Yugoslavia was meant to mark the end of a hierarchical society where Serbs received preferential treatment over their Albanian and Croatian neighbors. Tito coupled this goal with a unique brand of communism which promoted equality while resisting some of the more isolationist aspects of Russian communism. Tito is instead remembered as cooperative with western countries, being primarily concerned with improving the economy and educational systems of Yugoslavia. Tito's encouragement of an international community is evidenced by his

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<sup>42</sup> Hidini

<sup>43</sup> ibid

<sup>44</sup> Haleim

insistence that any and all displays of ethnic superiority or solidarity were regressive and he was quick to quell any displays of ethnic identification. The opening of the first Albanian university in Yugoslavia near the end of the Tito era in 1975 is a memorable example of Tito's seeming refusal to give credence to ethnic divisions within his country. Despite a large portion of his population, primarily those of Serbian descent, were greatly opposed to Albanian empowerment in the form of education. It was recalled that "many Serbians were angry at Tito for this university, claiming that providing Albanians with higher education will be more dangerous than providing them with guns (and this is in a country where only military personnel were allowed to carry firearms)."<sup>45</sup> This disregard for his citizens' concerns in the pursuit of a more egalitarian Yugoslavia was a memorable characteristic of Tito's rule. While Tito's disregarding of ethnic diversity is viewed as contributing to the eventual intercultural violence in the region, those living under Tito view his efforts as admirable in the face of a daunting history of ethnic conflict.

#### **CONSEQUENCES FROM THE FALL OF COMMUNISM**

For a better understanding of the degree to which war-time rhetoric permeated Yugoslavia's educational systems, imagine a typical elementary-level classroom. While young students may be exposed to merely a cursory understanding of historical, violent conflicts, it is strange to think of young students studying the events of WWII, or any other war. However, more than sixty-six percent of elementary-level textbooks from this period of Yugoslavia's past contained information about wars; particularly WWII.

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<sup>45</sup> Hidini

Examining these texts closer reveals the startling statistic that approximately three-fourths of the historical figures studied were described as "war heroes," while politicians, scientists, artists and philosophers comprised the remaining twenty-five percent.<sup>46</sup> While the previously mentioned interviews of individuals living under the Tito regime did much to counter-balance the assertions of western academics about the region's past, memories of their schooling in Yugoslavia is very much in line with the observations made by Hoepken and others. Without exception, interviewees confirmed the portrayal of Yugoslavian's education system as being largely military-centric.<sup>47</sup>



Figure 1. Pictures from internet showing Tito being dressed in military uniforms

All remembered historical figures of significance portrayed in Yugoslavian schools during the 1970s were militaristic and were overwhelmingly portrayed as communist partisan war heroes. Even Tito, hailing from the ever-peaceful Dalmatians,

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<sup>46</sup> Georgoff 445

<sup>47</sup> Haleim

"was represented in classrooms as a strong, heroic figure from the war."<sup>48</sup> Developing this image further, Tito himself never abandoned his military identity throughout his life, regularly being dressed in military uniforms.<sup>49</sup> Today a quick search on the internet shows that first 8 out of first 10 pictures of Tito are all with military uniforms. There also existed a vague memory of a few other cursory historical figures from before WWII, but even these were promoted due to their military exploits, defending against Ottomans.<sup>50</sup>

These personal memories from an education within Tito-era Yugoslavia do much to support the observations by historians who argue that Yugoslavia's communist ruling party took great lengths to legitimize war as a cultural symbol through a careful presentation of the region's history. During this area, a "partisan," military individual was showed as the most honored person and as the ultimate hero figure. Tito being a partisan himself was highlighted as the role model in the Yugoslav educational system.

As ethnic conflict is undeniably a complex issue with numerous motivations and justifications, it is impossible to pinpoint a single source for the eventual violent upheaval that would come to plague Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth century. As observed by Hoepken, "the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the bloody war were not caused by historical memory or by education. However, the way in which the Second World War was remembered through education and in public knowledge may well have influenced the political events that led to the violent clashes of the early 1990s."<sup>51</sup> Hoepken and

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<sup>48</sup> Hidini

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*

<sup>51</sup> Hoepkin, 204

many of his contemporaries argue that the influence that Yugoslavia's curriculum had in enabling, possibly even encouraging, intercultural violence can be traced back to two primary consequence of this educational model where the ultimate hero figure is communist partisan: 1) the glorification of sacrificing one's life for what they believe in, and 2) a repression of growing ethnic disputes in the country, particularly between the Serbs and Croats. In short, these two unforeseen consequences "made it easier for leaders to mobilize people for nationalist confrontation and ethnic violence."<sup>52</sup>

While most of the world remembered the events of WWII as a tragic reminder to the dangers of escalating violence, students in Yugoslavia were being taught that their country's most respectable and heroic figures emerged during the "glory days" of the war. Educational rhetoric promoted an image of conflict in which "death appeared largely to be a necessary sacrifice that must be made for one's community."<sup>53</sup> While the ruling Communist Party in Yugoslavia hoped to instill in young citizens the belief that the communist system was worth dying for, the actual effect did not achieve this goal. Instead, more than two generations worth of Yugoslavian citizens were learning that the most heroic form of sacrifice is a violent death brought about by relentlessly holding on to what you believe in even in the face of overwhelming odds.

This valorization of war as a cultural symbol is cited to have been unforeseeably dangerous when combined with the educational system's potential second negative tendency: the repression of ethnic tension in the region. As previously stated, the

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, 205

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, 203



Communist leadership in Yugoslavia following WWII took great lengths to present of class-centric view of the world – a view of Baltic history confirmed by personal interviews. Even in a region know for centuries to have supported multiple unique cultures, the ruling party hoped to erase ethnic diversity under the unifying banner of the proletariat. Ignoring cultural diversity (and its resulting intercultural tension) was painfully apparent in Yugoslavia's school system, where "education and academic historiography avoided an open, unrestricted discussion of the memory of the Serbian genocide in former decades."<sup>54</sup> After more than three decades of ignoring the country's underlying Croatian-Serbian tensions, the ethnic conflict erupted in violence in the 1980s following the end of the Tito regime.

Clearly, the Communist Party's control over Yugoslavia's learned history was incapable of permanently unifying these historically opposed cultural groups through economic solidarity. The communist government of post-WWII Yugoslavia underestimated the degree to which citizens were engrained in their long-standing ethnic conflict. While much of the rest of the world grew increasingly concerned with peaceful coexistence among diverse cultures as a result of the brutality of WWII, Yugoslavian citizens were forced to ignore deep-seeded ethnic conflict, never being presented with an opportunity to confront the issue with peaceful intentions. As proven by the region's tumultuous history, ignoring Yugoslavia's intercultural tension would do nothing for mending the division in the county's two dominant ethnic groups.

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, 202

## CONCLUSION

As outlined above, while academic material from the west surrounding this topic has framed communist policies in Yugoslavia following WWII as being largely responsible for the violence that surfaced in the early 1980s, personal interviews with individuals who attended public schools in Yugoslavia during this period paint a different picture of the influence that Tito's regime had on the region. In contrast, interviewees were confident that Tito's policies of ignored diversity were, in fact, the only thing keeping the country from violent conflict. This assertion is maybe best supported by that fact that inter-ethnic violence did not fully surface and begin to spread throughout the region until after the death of Tito in 1980.<sup>55</sup> However, while disagreeing with western academics on this point, the interviews did do much to support claims about the narrow and calculated scope of the Yugoslavian educational system following WWII. Historical information taught in these schools is remembered to resemble communist propaganda more than an unbiased historical narrative.

The tragic conflict that tore through the Balkans during the end of the twentieth century is undeniably a complex issue. It would be fruitless to look for a single cause for violence in such a multifaceted conflict. However, the selective history encouraged in Yugoslavia under Communist rule seems as one of the primary factors in the estimation of many historians which contributed to the seemingly inevitable explosion of intercultural violence in the region. A glorification of war as a cultural symbol combined with a repression of established ethnic conflict with hopes of a unified Yugoslavian

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<sup>55</sup> Hidini

proletariat would prove vastly ineffective. It is clear now that a conflict such as one which existed between Croats and Serbs in post-WWII Yugoslavia cannot be easily forgotten and should not be ignored. Despite the view of individuals living under the Tito regime that Communist policies were effective at resisting violent conflict in the region, open channels of dialogue and attempts at mutual understanding will always stand as the best approach for intercultural and ethnic conflict resolution.

## **Chapter 4: Nationalism and Violence in the Balkans**

### **BALKANS**

The history of the Balkans is one of deep religious and cultural differences. Over the last few hundred years, the region has been inhabited primarily by three faiths: Muslims, Christians, and Jews. In the 15<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the region was relatively peaceful. Though the region contained a diverse set of people, the area was relatively stable during the 15<sup>th</sup> through early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, modern forces of nationalism brought increasing instability and violence to this region in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Soon after, the effects of the Nazi invasion cut the religious and cultural diversity of the region, leaving comparatively homogenous regions within the country and forming tensions that disrupted its formerly pluralistic multiethnic heritage.

The history of the Balkans is one of great ethnic diversity, with various nations and ethnic groups not only living side by side but also cooperating and conflicting to form the ultimate cultural melting pot. But the diversity extends well beyond the interplay between Christianity and Islam or Western Europe and a generic Middle East. It also includes the Russian influence in the Northeast, forming a bridge between eastern and western Europe. More important still is the ancient disparity between Eastern Orthodox Christians and Catholics, whose enmity can be traced back to the brutal sacking of Constantinople in 1204. This led to an alliance of Orthodox Christians with first Byzantine and later Ottoman powers, who served as protectors against Catholic

influence. Notably, the Islam that developed in the region was a sort of “border religion”, which was more open to Christianity than unusual. <sup>56</sup>This three-way mixture of conflict and alliance would shift over time as Ottoman power waned. However, even at the start of the Bosnian War, the Catholic-Orthodox conflict remained an important idea, one whose influence would soon lead to violence against Muslim Bosnians.

When searching for a cause for the conflict that has plagued the Balkan region, it is natural to look toward the differences among people as the reason for intolerance and violence. As such, many investigations into this conflict have attempted to explain it as intolerance fueled by religious differences. In doing so, many have incorrectly cited the Ottoman millet system of government that was in effect in this region for centuries as the source of the conflict. An example of this argument is typically framed as follows: The Ottoman millet system divided regions of its empire into self-governing bodies that were categorized along religious lines. When the borders of the Ottoman Empire reached the Balkan region, the people living there were Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim. So, these groups that previously shared a government were now divided into millets based on their religion. From here, many who have written about this region have incorrectly cited this form of governance as the source of inter-religious conflict in the region. In truth, these groups functioned smoothly and without incident together and did not ever devolve into civil-war.<sup>57</sup> It is indeed true that Bosnia has a history of violence fueled by religious difference, but this conflict was between the Roman Catholic Church and the Bosnian

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<sup>56</sup> Mazower 26

<sup>57</sup> Eminov, Ali. *Turkish and Other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria*. (Hurst and Company Publishing, London: 1997.) 11

Church. Bosnia sits isolated from outside influence, surrounded by mountains. Because of this, the Pope's influence over Catholicism in Bosnia was very weak. Catholicism gradually evolved in Bosnia to the point that the Pope called Bosnians heretics and declared a crusade against them in 1235.<sup>58</sup> With this aggression, Catholicism in Bosnia officially cut ties with the Vatican and instead became their own autonomous Bosnian Church. So, Bosnia does have a past of religious violence, but this occurred between Bosnian Christians and invaders from outside of the country, not between two religious groups within Bosnia.

#### **RISE OF NATIONALISM IN THE BALKANS**

The true culprit behind this conflict is in fact nationalism, not religious difference. In essence, Nationalists are people who believe that leaders and their constituents must belong to the same ethnic group. While nationalism has sometimes been the motivation for unity, it is more often a force that has led to the rending apart of multi-ethnic states as nationalists argue and often promote the idea that "the existence of multiple ethnic communities within a single state is a source of tension and instability."<sup>59</sup>

Though Balkan nationalists have claimed otherwise, Ottoman rule was often benevolent, and particularly accommodated people of multiple faiths, including Jews and diverse Christians, who worked and often thrived together. As Ottoman control waned, Muslims left or were expelled, and resentment against Jews increased as national identities became tied up with ethnic, cultural, and racial groups. During the 19th and

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<sup>58</sup> Eminov, 18

<sup>59</sup> Eminov, 3

early 20th century, this effect reduced the ethnic diversity in the region. The most obvious and harmful example of this can be seen in the Nazi invasion in World War II, which radically reduced the Jewish population through genocide. Though parceling up of Balkan lands by various nations may have been inevitable, the conflict over ownership of natural resources and ethnic ties to geography led to clearly violent and harmful effects in the region.

While Balkan nationalism had been an effective tool to unite disparate peoples in speeding the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the region, these nationalist claims quickly turned the Balkan people against one another as claims to various natural resources and trade routes were suddenly up for grabs. However, just as nationalism is difficult to define, it also proved difficult to harness, and often past conflict, rather than resource control, became the primary motivation for future violence. The propensity of nationalism to lead to violent conflicts spiraling out of control is most obvious in the events leading up to World War I, when regional nationalist conflict in the Balkans managed to embroil the entire European continent in war. The formation of Yugoslavia served as a brief respite from these repeated acts of violence and hatred, but upon its dissolution the same nationalist ideals and hatreds rapidly plunged the region into violence, and later, under Milosevic, ethnic cleansing. Because of the potent and dangerous history of nationalism in this region, the Balkans in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century serves as an excellent case study. By considering the regional concepts of national pride, security, and advancement in the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia we can see how education and propaganda are used by powerful elites in these countries to guide

their agendas. Many of the tools of nationalism that these countries took advantage of can be clearly traced back to prior European examples from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **CONFLICT IN THE BALKANS- BEFORE WORLD WAR-II**

The recent conflict in present day Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the period from 1992-1995, reveal the cost of nationalism, both as a historic legacy and modern ideology. Though the fighting and dispute was mainly between nationalist Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats, the nature of their ethnic and national claims to proper regional ownership led to the massacre of thousands of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks)<sup>60</sup>, particularly in the massacre at Srebrenica. While these events did not follow from a lone ideological force, the importance of nationalist aims and their historical and current influence in the region played a direct role in the recent conflict. Unfortunately, revisionist histories and manipulation of news coverage has made it difficult to directly expose the role of nationalism in these regions. This is particularly confounded by nationalism's conflicting role in political ideologies for Serbia and Croatia, where regional pride and a religious and linguistic identity serve both as a heroic force in the uprisings against fading Ottoman control and also as a source of persecution from opposing nationalist forces during World War II and marginalization under the Yugoslavian government that followed.

With the Ottoman Empire fading, and Austrian forces pressing in from the north, regional leaders embraced a vision of national history and identity to unify forces and

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<sup>60</sup> Patrick Ball & Ewa Tabeau & Philip Verwimp. *The Bosnian Book of Dead: Assessment of the Database (Full Report)*. HiCN Research Design Notes 5, Households in Conflict Network, 2007.



groups for local control. Croatians faced a competing idea of both a unified region (Jugoslavenstvo) and Croatian nationalism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, foreshadowing the conflict of ideals to follow. This resulted in the formation of a Croatian Party of Rights, which relied on openly racist rhetoric, terming Jews and Serbians as “breeds”, while oddly allying itself with local Bosnian Muslims in spite of identifying with conservative Catholicism, in opposition to the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, Serbians formed an ill-defined national identity in spite of, or perhaps because of the decline of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires which divided modern Serbians between them. However, this identity was mixed in with the idea of a unified Slavic region shared with Croatians and other groups.

Serbians often did not acknowledge a difference between themselves and the unification of other ethnic groups in the region, which some saw or at least portrayed as an attempt at hegemony.<sup>62</sup> With the rise of Croatian nationalism, Serbians came to separate themselves more clearly and in stricter opposition to other national groups, particularly Croatians in the 1930s and 40s.<sup>63</sup> The fractured idea of what, exactly, defined a Serb and Serbian lands would later hamper nationalists attempting to create a political plan based on a united Serbia.<sup>64</sup> However, these divisions also provided a pressing need for Serbian nationalists to assert some form of unity and to claim a set of contested lands

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<sup>61</sup> Fischer, Bernd J. *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of South-Eastern Europe*. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007) 63.

<sup>62</sup> Toal, Gerard, and Carl Dahlman. *Bosnia Remade*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 52.

<sup>63</sup> Toal and Dahlman 54.

<sup>64</sup> Toal and Dahlman 59

that they could claim as a point of political differentiation and power from Serbians based on a more collective vision of the Balkans.

## **CONFLICT IN THE BALKANS- DURING WORLD WAR-II**

During World War II, the Axis powers successfully invaded large swaths of the Balkans and forever warped the role of nationalism in the region and the world, splitting what had been a tensely united Kingdom of Yugoslavia into separate regions and melding the concept of nationalism with that of racism and fascism. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia had been in conflict with Croats and Croatian nationalists for several years leading up to the war. Their government was implicated in the killing of a Croatian professor by Albert Einstein in May of 1931<sup>65</sup> and connected to Serbians through the emotional killing of a famous Croatian politician, Stjepan Radić, on the floor of parliament in 1928.<sup>66</sup>

King Alexander I tried to stifle this conflict by outlawing political parties based on national or ethnic differences and forming a dictatorship in 1929. This in turn resulted in the exile of Croatian nationalist politicians and journalists, further galvanizing Croatian youth to more radical anti-government rhetoric. These fiercely nationalistic young Croats formed the fascist Ustasa movement with the goal of achieving Croatian independence through violence. This group gained power and popularity during the early 1930s and eventually assassinated King Alexander I in 1935<sup>67</sup>. In spite of growing influence and the

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<sup>65</sup> "Einstein Accuses Yugoslavian Rulers in Savant's Murder." *The New York Times*. 6 May 1931. Page 1: 1.

<sup>66</sup> "Stjepan Radić." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/488661/Stjepan-Radic>>.

<sup>67</sup> "Alexander I." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/14042/Alexander-I>>.

rising political force of nationalist fascism in Germany, the Ustasa still did not possess as much mainstream appeal as the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS). But after the German's invaded the region, the HSS declined to cooperate with the Nazis, and the Ustase stepped in, as party leaders returning from exile in Italy.

Much like the Nazi party, the Ustasa committed numerous acts of genocide. Unlike the French Vichy government, the Ustasa utilized the violence of the concentration camps to promote their own views of Croatian nationalist and racial superiority through mass killings, targeting Serbians who they had formerly opposed. Here, the subjective violence that Žižek describes can be seen to flow from the objective violence of racist language that the Ustasa utilized to promote their nationalist agenda. Over the years the history of this event has been shifted, depending on the source, to support political and ideological aims. The United States Holocaust Museum summarizes this point eloquently:

“Due to differing views and lack of documentation, estimates for the number of Serbian victims in Croatia range widely, from 25,000 to more than one million. The estimated number of Serbs killed in Jasenovac ranges from 25,000 to 700,000. The most reliable figures place the number of Serbs killed by the Ustaša between 330,000 and 390,000, with 45,000 to 52,000 Serbs murdered in Jasenovac.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. “Victims.” *Jasenovac Online Exhibit*. <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/jasenovac/history/section5.html>. Accessed on 4/21/2012.

The Ustasa's atrocities created the grounds for future historical conflict and, by labeling Serbs as a targeted group, gave Serbians a unified identity in victimhood. At the same time, Serbian nationalist forces known as the Chetniks also supported the Axis powers, though not so brutally or so thoroughly as Ustasa forces. As the Axis were pushed back, they too engaged in ethnic cleansing as they displaced Croatians, particularly former Ustasa and ethnic Germans living in the region.<sup>69</sup> These events would form the basis for a harsh nationalist pride on both sides, where each attempts to cast the other as a cruel historical oppressor.<sup>70</sup>

In response to the Axis invasion, a strong resistance force of guerrilla partisans led by Josip Tito proved resilient. As the war carried on these rebel fighters gained power and became the new leaders of the country, particularly as the Chetnik's Axis connections became better known. While Tito supported a united Yugoslavia and based his power on the diverse partisan resistance, his conflict with local Catholic groups and their Ustasa connections, resulting in his excommunication by the Vatican in 1946, put him at odds with many Croatians and provided additional fodder for anti-Serbian sentiment. Croatians would continue to provide resistance to Yugoslavian government, particularly in the "Croatian Spring" movement. Tito managed to maintain control, however, but after his death the tensions within the country began to break apart its foundation, leading to the division of several nations and setting the stage for the Bosnian war.

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<sup>69</sup> Tomasevich, Jozo. [War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: The Chetniks](#). (San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 1975) 256-261.

## **CONFLICT IN THE BALKANS- AFTER WORLD WAR-II**

The Yugoslavian government in the late 80s promoted the idea of nationalism and ethnicity as a key component of identity, blurring the line between ethnic groups, nations, and “peoples”. But it also emphasized the role of unity and brotherhood between the different ethnicities as part of Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, the perception of nations as biological entities locked in a Darwinian struggle over land rights and in particular their ties to a “homeland” caused these groups to fracture into separate interests. Nationalistic pride and belief in ethnic solidarity led these fractured groups to not only cement their differences and separation legally and military, but also allowed for the dehumanization of the other groups, leading to rape and killing of thousands of innocent Bosniak civilians in a tragedy that sadly echoed the events of the second World War. It is no coincidence that the worst atrocities of Yugoslavia’s breakup occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as it contained a relatively even ethnic split of 1.9 million Bosnian Muslims, 1.3 million Bosnian Serbs, and 750 thousand Bosnian Croats.<sup>71</sup>

As Yugoslavia broke down into Serbian and Croatian regions in the late 80s and early 90s, nationalist rhetoric began to increase on both sides. Serbians rallied behind Slobodan Milosevic, a media figurehead and political leader representing a new brand of Serbian nationalism, claiming that their rightful status within the region was underrepresented. Milosevic tactfully declared that “nationalism in general [was] a primitive way of showing national feelings” and warned against “its most aggressive

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<sup>70</sup> Toal and Dahlman 26.

<sup>71</sup> Toal and Dahlman 4.

form, chauvinism, [to which] there must be a response.”<sup>72</sup> Milosevic portrayed himself as a non-threatening representative of national pride, while at the same time subtly threatening other nationalist parties in the region. His political slogan, “no one should dare beat you”, perfectly summed up the veiled hostility he represented. His media ties allowed him to control media organizations, removing Croatian nationalists, and resulting in a similar response on Croatian news stations. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, Croats and Serbs manipulated history books and news reports to build up the idea of victimization by the other side, further developing their national identities in opposition to one another through biased news coverage that was termed “patriotic reporting”.<sup>73</sup> The loaded and at times racist language used by these media organizations constituted a prime example of Zizek’s objective violence and helped build up emotions to a nationalist fervor. Unfortunately, as is so often the case with objective violence, the patterns of hatred that it encouraged would soon result in the most heinous example of subjective violence, the tragedy of genocide.

The Slovenians were first to break off from Yugoslavia, and did so in the relatively peaceful ten day war. The Croats and Bosnians, however, each seeking their own secession from Yugoslavia, which was increasingly becoming Serbian-dominated, faced far more violent conflict. The Croats voted for independence in 1991 and began a war for independence with Yugoslavia which would run in parallel to the Bosnian War. In the case of Bosnia, Yugoslav army forces attempted to prevent a vote on the

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<sup>72</sup> Toal and Dahlman 41.

<sup>73</sup> Toal and Dahlman 43.

independence of the region in 1992. This only increased turnout and polarized local Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats, leading to a 99% vote in favor.<sup>74</sup> At this point, media networks were escalating their nationalist rhetoric. Milosevic and the Serbian media networks already had a great deal of experience casting their Croatian opponents as cruel oppressors, and they used these same tools to propagandize the dangers of Bosnian secession.<sup>75</sup> They focused their claims on the idea that Bosnians discriminated against Serbs on religious grounds and that Serbians were being forced out of their homes and neighborhoods by Bosnian Muslims. In the violent conflict to come, Serbians would employ this exact tactic against Bosniaks.<sup>76</sup>

#### **CONFLICT IN THE BALKANS- AFTER 1990**

That same year, Yugoslavian military and administrative forces, supported by Milosovic, began to coordinate with some Bosnian Serbs to form a political and military group in Bosnia, the Vojska Republike Srpske. The VRS began a campaign to actively separate Bosnia-Herzegovina's "national communities" and create a new state, Republica Srpska, for Bosnian Serbs alone. Supported by Yugoslavia and having the initiative, this group gained military control of 70% of Bosnia before the end of the year.<sup>77</sup> They started an explicit policy of displacing Bosnian Croats and Muslims by forcing them from their

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<sup>74</sup> Mestrovic, Stjepan. *Genocide After Emotion: The post emotional Balkan War*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 36.

<sup>75</sup> Lieblich, Julia and Boskailo, Esad. *Wounded I Am More Awake*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012)

<sup>76</sup> Toal and Dahlman 94.

<sup>77</sup> Toal and Dahlman 6

homes and into separate geographical areas designated by ethnicity. This mistreatment may be seen to represent the worst form of Žižek's systemic violence, as this policy led to the mistreatment, though not direct physical harm, of millions. Hundreds of thousands of Bosnian Muslims and Croats would be forcibly removed from their homes and livelihoods during this time in a sad echo of the atrocities perpetrated by the Ustase and (to a lesser degree) Cetnick forces decades prior. This also marked the popularization of the term ethnic cleansing, which first appeared in the New York Times in 1992. The phrase was coined by nationalist Croatian media as a way to describe the particular displacement and violence that they faced from Serbian VRS and Yugoslavian forces in Bosnia and in their own war. By 1995, however, many Bosnian Croatian forces would perpetrate the same violent act that they so eloquently described.<sup>78</sup>

Bosnian Croats formed their own defense, initially, as did the Bosnian government. However, in 1993 the Bosnian Croats turned against the Bosnian army and Bosnian Muslims, taking territory from them as well as defending territory from VRS forces. However, this further cemented the role of ethnic cleansing and the homogenization of neighborhoods and territories.<sup>79</sup> Before the end of the conflict with the VRS, the Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks signed a ceasefire known as the Washington Agreement.<sup>80</sup> But even this agreement divided up their territory into separate cantons, acknowledging the success of ethnic cleansing in turning neighborhoods and regions into

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<sup>78</sup> Toal and Dahlman 3.

<sup>79</sup> Toal and Dahlman 6.

<sup>80</sup> Bethlehem, Daniel L.; Weller, Marc (1997). [The 'Yugoslav' Crisis in International Law](#). Cambridge International Documents Series. 5. Cambridge University Press. p. liiv.



a local ethnic space and tying that space to political power. This ideology continued to be reflected in policy continued as Bosnian Croats pushed back against VRS forces in successful counteroffensives. Over a hundred thousand Serbs were displaced in this time, though many left before the assault and may have been encouraged to do so by the VRS itself. In 1995, with the conflict winding down, VRS forces perpetrated the most atrocious act of the war, the Massacre at Srebrenica of over 8,000 Bosniak men and boys, which the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia determined to constitute a genocide.<sup>81</sup>

The ethnic cleansing started by the VRS, which was also partly continued by Bosnian Croat forces, reflected a classic belief in nationalist power and influence. One classic nationalist goal of the VRS was that of actively taking a territorial resource to improve the well-being of one's nation, in this case by providing access to the Mediterranean.<sup>82</sup> While this goal was explicitly spelled out in policy statements, it cannot explain the objective violence of Srebrenica. In a conflict marked by the expulsion of millions from their homes, what trigger was there for the violence in this particular case? Here, we can look to Žižek's form of objective violence, namely that of language and racism, that was so closely tied to the nationalist rhetoric used to justify this war. There was an active attempt to homogenize the culture and history of the regions that had been ethnically cleansed, as evidenced by the destruction of mosques and Catholic churches<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Radislav Krsti* [2004] IT-98-33-A (International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia Since 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Toal and Dahlman 5.

<sup>83</sup> Toal and Dahlman 4.

and by the renaming of towns and streets<sup>84</sup> to reflect a pro-nationalist mono-ethnic history. The racist and ethnic hatred tied to this identity formation may have attributed to Bosnian Croat's attacks on Bosniaks, as many strongly nationalist Croats who served first to defend against VRS forces were also strong advocates of their own religious and ethnic superiority, an idea which inherently justified invasions of Bosniak territory and furthered the ethnic division of the region.<sup>85</sup> This may also explain why Bosnian Muslims suffered the greatest casualties and perpetrated the fewest war crimes, as determined by the Hague tribunal,<sup>86</sup> as Bosniaks had little history of nationalist hatred and intolerance to draw on. In the case of Croat and Serbian forces, their nationalist rhetoric and its ties to a belief in religious superiority helped justify the idea of separation and also of competition. But this idea alone was not enough to justify the atrocities at Srebrenica, and does little to explain why Bosniaks too joined in the renaming of streets, remaking neighborhoods along ethnic lines and washing over the region's history of diversity.

#### **ANALYSIS OF THE BALKANS CONFLICT THROUGH THE LENS OF NATIONALISM**

Just as the nationalist rhetoric referenced prior atrocities committed during World War II, the tragedy of Srebrenica was also based upon prior injustices. As Bosnian Croats received additional NATO support after the Washington Agreement, they took back lands claimed by the VRS during 94 and 95. The Serbs displaced at this time were moved back into villages still controlled by the VRS and were more likely to serve as police and local

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<sup>84</sup> Toal and Dahlman 265.

<sup>85</sup> Toal and Dahlman 63.

<sup>86</sup> Toal and Dahlman 136.

government of these newly Serbian towns. Because of their personal experience of exile, these pseudo-refugees had a powerful and personal basis for anti-Croat and general nationalist anger. Many of the police in the town of Zvornik, for example, were comprised of displaced Serbs and later helped to rebury bodies in an attempt to cover up the Srebrenica massacre.<sup>87</sup> It is this escalating cycle of violence that can ultimately be blamed for this great tragedy, as well as the echo chamber of nationalist rhetoric that kept that violence alive and helped amplify it, particularly on an objective and systemic level through biased policies and language. VRS propaganda had cast the Bosnian Muslims in the region as Ottoman invaders, ignoring the fact that the Ottoman Empire had dissolved 70 years prior.<sup>88</sup> This objective violence, the use of biased and hateful language to cast former neighbors as foreign invaders, allowed Serbians to dehumanize the Bosniak civilians, a crucial step towards the subjective violence of the massacre. This same echo chamber also allowed the violence to be misdirected against the easiest available target after NATO support began pushing back VRS control in the area.<sup>89</sup> With a ceasefire imminent, Bosnian Muslim civilians in Srebrenica, cut off from the Bosniak and Croatian military forces, were the victims of these final pushes for territory. In these late stages, with each side increasingly affected by nationalist propaganda, ethnic cleansing, and violence, VRS forces massacred between 7 and 8 thousand Bosnian Muslim civilians in Srebrenica, and raped many of the women. Shortly thereafter, facing growing NATO

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<sup>87</sup> Toal and Dahlman 118.

<sup>88</sup> Toal and Dahlman 66.

<sup>89</sup> Toal and Dahlman 131.

opposition and shrinking Yugoslavian support, the VRS negotiated a ceasefire through the Dayton agreement.<sup>90</sup>

While the Bosnians and Croatians did, in the end, “win” their goal of independence in the Dayton Agreements, ending the overt and subjective violence of the war, one cannot help but worry about the violent history and ideology this recent conflict might support. Even with the atrocities of World War II still fresh in their memories, Serbians, Croatians, and even a few Bosniaks still committed sadly similar war crimes, even while claiming to be historical victims of them. The narrative that supported these nationalist hatreds was put forth by separate nationalist political organizations, now supported by modern news networks. Croatians and Serbians were quick to recognize the power of these ideas and the media that spread them, but the two major attempts to censor nationalist perspectives each failed, and further galvanized the populace in support of their movements, first in the 1920s under King Alexander and second in the late 1980s in the form of nationalist television networks. These examples of censorship were the most prominent example of Žižek’s systemic violence, a violence that subtly represses a particular group. Victims of this violence, Žižek points out, often become perpetrators of objective or subjective violence in response, and we can see clear examples of that behavior here, as the perceived slight of censorship was used as justification for nationalist outrage, in turn leading to objective and subjective violence in each case. Rather than silencing their target, these actions in fact polarized the opposition and helped validate the cycle of strife and violence. Unfortunately, the current media climate

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<sup>90</sup> Toal and Dahlman 136.

in Bosnia has replicated the hatred-based nationalist rhetoric as local television news has targeted individual ethnic groups, leading to similar nationalist hatreds between Bosnian Serbs, Bosniaks, and Bosnian Croats living in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>91</sup> Building a tolerant media climate that discourages pro-nationalist propaganda cannot be achieved through censorship. However, the problem presented by nationalist propaganda cannot be left unanswered.

In the Bosnian war we can see all three kinds of violence that Zizek describes. The systemic violence of censorship and of displaced and exiled persons motivates racist and hateful language to rise up in opposition through objective violence, which in turn leads to the physical atrocities and subjective violence of war and genocide. The ethnic cleansing that formed separate nations has unfortunately combined with harmful nationalist rhetoric to produce homogenous neighborhoods that are prone to further systemic violence in the form of biased policies that favor one ethnic group over others. As Zizek predicted, and as it turned out in the past, this may perpetuate another cycle of violence as the separate ethnic groups grow more divided and antagonistic. Fearing discrimination and unsupportive neighborhoods, different ethnic groups that were displaced in the conflict have been reluctant to return to neighborhoods now dominated by other ethnic groups, preferring to “return with the flag” and a block of other Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats, or Bosnian Serbs.<sup>92</sup> Sadly, local governments dominated by individual ethnic groups did little to discourage these problems, and likely helped perpetuate them

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<sup>91</sup> Toal and Dahlman 183.

<sup>92</sup> Toal and Dahlman 178

by selectively enforcing property laws and other legal protections. Over the years, careful monitoring and international efforts have helped an estimated one million displaced persons return home. But some towns, such as Jajce, have experienced large ethnic shifts and homogenization based around nationalist and separatist rhetoric, reinforced by local laws and attitudes.<sup>93</sup> However, the international and local efforts to push back against this form of systemic violence represent an important development in avoiding these problems in the future.

In trying to prevent a repetition of the violence in Bosnia, we may find hope in the ethno-symbolist paradigm of the study of nationalism. The experience of Bosnia shows that governments and media recognize currents of nationalism and actively seek to both harness and build upon them. The modernist interpretations of nationalism can explain this phenomenon as manipulation of the masses by elites or as the filling of a social and political void in the collapse of communism and rise of capitalism. But these interpretations offer little to help guide policy or to explain how these ideologies and ideas influence citizens and how they are in turn influenced by powerful citizens. Unlike the other approaches, ethno-symbolism might provide insight into how these nationalist forms of violence are perpetuated and how they are used to motivate violence and build public support for nationalist governments.

Ethno-symbolism may yet provide a tool for understanding this manipulation of public opinion, and hopefully a similar tool to reverse it. Recognizing the harm caused by systemic violence against separate ethnic and nationalist groups as well as the danger of

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<sup>93</sup> Toal and Dahlman 285

nationalist propaganda and the ineffectiveness of censorship as a counter to it may represent a good first step. But further work is needed to understand how nationalism moves people to war. Through this improved understanding, it may be possible to develop strategies in both policy and political ideology that counter nationalism's homogenizing forces and end this cycle of violence.

## **Chapter 5: The Gülen Movement: Peace through Education in the Balkans**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Peace accords and cease-fires are signed and broken by the governments of our world at an alarming rate. Such failure at achieving true peace leaves the hopeful among us embittered and skeptical of the potential for discernible progress toward universal peace. In order to revitalize the resolve of the peace-mongering community, new and effective methods of achieving peace and tolerance must be explored. The Gülen Movement<sup>94</sup> provides a living example of just this type of grassroots peace building. This chapter will investigate the Gülen Movement and its efforts toward bringing peace, dialogue and tolerance to the war-torn region of the Balkans. If their methods are both understood as well as seen to be effective, their model for inviting positive change can be used throughout the globe in areas in desperate need of progress toward peace. Said investigation will begin with an explanation of the Gülen Movement – an examination of the views and writings of Fethullah Gülen, and how he relates to the Movement as a source of inspiration. Next, the paper will briefly explain the history of the conflict in the region. Understanding this history will allow a better appreciation of the actions of the Gülen Movement in the Balkans. Following this section, we will see the effect that this conflict has had on the educational institutions in the region. As much of Gülen's teachings concentrate on the potential that education provides in the peace building



process, it will be important to see how a violent conflict can hurt educational systems. Finally, this chapter will explore possible methodologies for future research in this area with a look into actual research examples of the Gülen Movement at work in Southeast Turkey.

It must be noted that the Balkan region is comprised of a number of diverse and separate nations. However, in this investigation, each separate piece of the source material concentrates on a specific country or city within the Balkan region. As this region is incredibly dynamic, what is true for one country within the region may not necessarily be true for all. However, in an attempt to draw conclusions about the entire region, individual countries are required to provide representative examples of the greater whole. The present research necessitates that these representative samples be Kosovo, Bosnia and Albania. While further inquiry could be conducted into the finer differences between the different states within the Balkans, the following investigation concentrates on the commonality between these countries in an attempt to locate methods for progress encouraged and enacted by the Gülen Movement.

#### **THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT AND GÜLEN'S VIEWS ON DIALOGUE AND EDUCATION**

Turkish-born educator and scholar Fethullah Gülen has devoted his life to encouraging peaceful coexistence through the promotion of dialogue and education. Gülen's ideals continue to spread throughout the world through the efforts of a network of like-minded supporters whose actions are inspired by the life and teachings of Gülen.

The “Gülen Movement” has been instrumental in efforts to cultivate safe environments for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue around the globe.

Fethullah Gülen stands out as a unique Islamic scholar as he is both knowledgeable of the Qur’an and hadiths, as well as being intimately familiar with contemporary natural sciences. This combination has allowed Gülen to argue his beliefs in tolerance, peace, and the importance of education with grace and sound logic.<sup>94</sup>(Williams<sup>785</sup>) Gülen often quotes the Qur’anic verse, “We created you in different tribes and nations so that you may know one another.”<sup>95</sup> Placing such emphasis on this teaching shows that he believes in reaching a harmonious balance between different cultures as he has achieved with his traditional Islamic culture and today’s scientific world.

In the spirit of this striving for harmony between nations, a network of volunteers has been cooperating under the banner of the “Gülen Movement.” Adherents to Gülen’s teachings are responsible for the propagation of “an apolitical, highly tolerant and open regeneration of individuals and thus societies.”<sup>96</sup> One of the Movement’s most important goals is the promotion of proper education. This is because “it is not only the establishment of justice that is hindered by the lack of well-rounded education, but also the recognition of human rights and attitudes of acceptance and tolerance toward others.”<sup>97</sup> In light of this, it is little surprise that Gülen-inspired schools have been popular additions to regions of marked intolerance and poor human rights. As Williams has observed, progress in such regions can be made with schools that “are focused on

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<sup>95</sup> Qur’an 49.13

<sup>96</sup> Williams 792

creating literate, independent thinkers who will be agents of change for equality, inclusiveness and social justice.”<sup>98</sup>

With a combination of dialogue and actions of devoted volunteers, the Gülen Movement “alerts a collective consciousness to the radical nature of social, cultural and spiritual needs that politics ignores, or which it mishandles by reducing them to arenas of contention between antagonistic factions.”<sup>99</sup> This Movement, unbound by confining rules and guidelines, has been able to adapt to the needs of each region and area of conflict in a way that has allowed followers of Gülen’s teaching to best serve the needs of the community in question. Many other service organizations do not possess this level of freedom and flexibility and have thus been unsuccessful in the same capacity in bringing about tolerance, dialogue and acceptance between communities that would otherwise remain ignorant and at odds with each other. Such flexibility is important to the success of the Movement because “the methods and structures for peace building and service must be particularized to the contradictions and attitudes unique to each locality, while also committed to the universal purposes of deep peacemaking.”<sup>100</sup>

Just as the world-famous sufi poet Rumi promoted 800 years ago, Fethullah Gülen has devoted his life to the promotion of “humanity, love, compassion, tolerance, respect for, openness to and acceptance of the other in their otherness and dialogue.”<sup>101</sup> Evidence of this likeness is seen in Gülen’s assertion that “man has a responsibility to

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<sup>97</sup> Williams 793

<sup>98</sup> Williams 793

<sup>99</sup> Williams 802

<sup>100</sup> Tyler 64

show compassion to all living beings, as a requirement of being human. The more he displays compassion, the more exalted he becomes.”<sup>102</sup> Gülen believes that the best avenue for encouraging such values and behavior in others is through proper education. The path to peaceful coexistence runs directly through the classroom where students can learn early on the benefits of tolerance, dialogue and respect for the “Other.” Additionally, “Gülen does not see the world in political terms and does not draw imaginary boundaries...Gülen is a ‘border transgressor.’”<sup>103</sup>

While supporters of the Gülen Movement can be credited for hundreds of educational institutions, their efforts have the most potential and are needed most desperately in regions plagued with deep-seeded intercultural conflict. If the Gülen Movement proves to be successful in such a region, then their model for achieving peace could stand as a powerful example for the challenge of bringing peace and dialogue to similar regions around the world. This paper will look at the efforts of the Gülen Movement in the Balkans and how Fethullah Gülen’s ideals have provided crucial steps toward peace in this region that has a long history of intercultural intolerance and violence.

## **HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CONFLICT**

The region of the present-day Balkans has changed hands many times throughout history. Standing as a gateway between the East and the West, the Balkans’ unique history has led to a country rich with cultural and religious diversity. However, this

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<sup>101</sup> Yilmaz 26

<sup>102</sup> Yilmaz 29

diversity has resulted in a past and present ripe with intercultural tension and conflict. Understanding the roots of this conflict will help readers recognize the importance of the goals and actions of the Gülen Movement in the Balkans.

The history of the Balkans is one of steadily growing intercultural tension and dangerous nationalist beliefs. For example, these growing nationalist sentiments led to Serbia violently wrestling Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. This move by Serbia ended centuries of peace shared between Serbians and Albanians in the region. The violent conflict between these two ethnic groups would rise and fall in intensity through the following decades but would eventually escalate and culminate in the advent of the Kosovo War in 1995.

Bosnia has had a past very similar to that of Kosovo. Beginning with the population of Bosnia by Slavic settlers in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, the area has since passed between the hands of Serbians and Croats, Ottomans and Hungarians, Catholics and Orthodox.<sup>104</sup> The violence that came along with these changes in ownership was never fueled by religious or cultural disputes. Wars and battles do indeed fill the Bosnian history books, but the motivation for these conflicts was always a result of attempts expanding borders and acquiring resources.

Kosovo and Bosnia were not the only countries in the region undergoing violent conflict during this time. Their neighbors were dealing with similar problems as “the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia fragmented into a series of violent civil wars

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<sup>103</sup> Yilmaz 35

between Catholic Croats, Muslim Bosniaks, and Orthodox Serbs.”<sup>105</sup> For years the Balkans would undergo unrelenting violence, sieges of civilian cities, attempts at ethnic cleansing, and large-scale displacement of communities. In this time of inescapable violence, “individuals and families were compelled to side with ‘their own,’ to pursue security within a narrative of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’”<sup>106</sup> Anyone acting outside of the confines of their own community would immediately become a target, and thus, cross-cultural cooperation and dialogue was sacrificed in the name of fear. This region became so infamous for its inter-cultural conflict that the term “Balkanization” came to describe “the contemporary phenomenon of identity-based division, distrust, and violence that leads to the fragmentation of society.”<sup>107</sup> Conflict fueled by such motivation is likely to have negative effects on a population well after violence has ceased. The divisions between ethnic and cultural groups will hold for many years in the form of distrust and discrimination making efforts at peace building problematic.

When searching for a cause for the conflict that has plagued the Balkan region, it is natural to look toward the differences among people as the reason for intolerance and violence. As such, many investigations into this conflict have attempted to explain it as intolerance fueled by religious differences. In doing so, many have incorrectly cited the Ottoman millet system of government that was in effect in this region for centuries as the source of the conflict. This argument is typically framed as follows: The Ottoman millet

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<sup>104</sup> Donia 34

<sup>105</sup> Tyler 55

<sup>106</sup> *ibid*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*

system divided regions of its empire into self-governing bodies that were categorized along religious lines. When the borders of the Ottoman Empire reached the Balkan region, the people living there were Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Muslim. So, these groups that previously shared a government were now divided into millets based on their religion. From here, many who have written about this region have incorrectly cited this form of governance as the source of inter-religious conflict in the region. In truth, these groups functioned smoothly and without incident together and did not ever devolve into civil war.<sup>108</sup> It is indeed true that Bosnia has a history of violence fueled by religious difference, but this conflict was between the Roman Catholic Church and the Bosnian Church. Bosnia sits isolated from outside influence, surrounded by mountains. Because of this, the Pope's influence over Catholicism in Bosnia was very weak. Catholicism gradually evolved in Bosnia to the point that the Pope called Bosnians heretics and declared a crusade against them in 1235.<sup>109</sup> With this aggression, Catholicism in Bosnia officially cut ties with the Vatican and instead became their own autonomous Bosnian Church. So, Bosnia does have a past of religious violence, but this occurred between Bosnian Christians and invaders from outside of the country, not between two religious groups within Bosnia.

The true culprit behind this conflict is in fact nationalism, not religious difference. In essence, Nationalists are people who believe that leaders and their constituents must belong to the same ethnic group. While nationalism has sometimes been the motivation for unity, it is more often a force that has led to the rending apart of multi-ethnic states as

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<sup>108</sup> Eminov 11

nationalists argue and often promote the idea that “the existence of multiple ethnic communities within a single state is a source of tension and instability.”<sup>110</sup> Nationalist fervor was slowly spreading across Europe from West to East encouraging people to band together with others of their own ethnicity and demand a sovereign country. However, “It is only the fanaticism of nationalists that insist that states must be based on ethnicity and be nation-states and that pluralism is artificial and unworkable.”<sup>111</sup> Despite the Ottoman millet system of cooperation and tolerance functioning well in the region for centuries, the import of nationalism from the west throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century began to fuel distrust and aggression among different ethnic groups in the Balkan region.<sup>112</sup>

These sentiments escalated greatly over the years between Croatians and Serbians and were intensified during the years of occupation by the Hapsburg dynasty. During this period in Bosnia’s history, the Hapsburg dynasty considered Serbia to be a much greater threat to their occupation of Bosnia than did Croatia.<sup>113</sup> In an attempt to lessen this perceived threat, Hapsburg leadership encouraged resentment against Serbian-Bosnians on nationalist grounds. However, the Serbian and Croatian populations in Bosnia were very evenly matched and neither could manage to develop dominance. The Muslim community of Bosnia held considerable influence and power in Bosnia but stood apart from this rivalry. Because of this, Hungarian leaders attempted to encourage Bosnian Muslims to identify themselves as Croatian in an attempt to give Croatian nationalist

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<sup>109</sup> Eminov 18

<sup>110</sup> Eminov 3

<sup>111</sup> Eminov 8

<sup>112</sup> Jelavich 350

<sup>113</sup> Jelavich 62



sentiments the upper hand in Bosnia.<sup>114</sup> Although this tactic failed because these people had considered themselves to be Bosnian for centuries, not Croatians or Serbians, this example from Bosnia's past exemplifies the negative influence of nationalism that was forced upon the Bosnian people from other countries in pursuit of selfish goals.

A similar attempt at encouraging nationalist feeling and fear-mongering occurred again many years later from Slobodan Milosevic, the much feared leader of Serbia and Yugoslavia. However, this second attempt was different than the one led by the Hapsburg Dynasty in three important ways: first, this time Serbians were the dominant voice rather than the Croatians. Secondly, Milosevic included and emphasized rhetoric against the Muslim population in Bosnia because he knew that Serbs and Croats were too friendly in Bosnia for his anti-Croatia campaign to be effective.<sup>115</sup> And finally, this attempt succeeded in inciting hatred and violence within Bosnia while the Hapsburg's attempt fell short of this goal. There's more than makes Milosevic's nationalist message and campaign even more detestable: by July of 1991 there existed ample evidence to support the fact that Milosevic had been supplying radical Serbians within Bosnia with weapons and ammunition.<sup>116</sup> This sad fact of Bosnia's past clearly shows that the conflict within Bosnia was in fact the result of the negative influence from outside sources rather than long-standing divisions among the people of Bosnia.

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<sup>114</sup> Jelavich 62

<sup>115</sup> Malcolm 225

<sup>116</sup> Malcolm 225

Members from both the Croatian and the Serbian sides of the conflict in Bosnia would argue that this conflict is fueled by ethnic differences. Such arguments are made in an attempt to justify the territorial expansion of both countries into Bosnia's border regions that are largely populated by either Croatian or Serbian descendants.<sup>117</sup> However, citing this conflict as a clash between ethnicities misrepresents the Bosnian people and their past. Despite the fact that Bosnians are a diverse people that could be classified under many different ethnic or religious labels, the people of Bosnia have their own unique culture and are distinctly Bosnian.<sup>118</sup> This unique culture is shared by all Bosnian people despite their ancestral heritage or religious background. While both Serbia and Croatia make claims to rightful ownership of Bosnian territory, Bosnia's borders have been maintained throughout history with far more consistency than both Serbia and Croatia.<sup>119</sup> What's more, despite the supposed division between ethnic groups in Bosnia, it is important to note that after living side by side for centuries, all of these people speak the same language. If any discernible difference were to be found between Bosnians, it would be more likely to be a difference between people due to religious background rather than ethnic heritage. However, even this difference is negligible as the typical Bosnians of today would not consider themselves to be deeply religious.<sup>120</sup>

Bosnia's tradition of tolerance is perhaps best exemplified by the composition of the Bosnian government during one of the darkest periods of Bosnian history. While the conflict in Bosnia was at its peak during the early part of the 1990s, the Bosnian cabinet

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<sup>117</sup> Eminov 6

<sup>118</sup> Eminov 7

<sup>119</sup> Eminov 7

remained in session with Croatian members, Serbian members, and Muslim members.<sup>121</sup> As rhetoric surrounding this conflict searched for explanations and accused Bosnia for bringing this hatred on themselves due to intolerance and a division between the people, the Bosnian leaders themselves continued to work in cooperation despite the differences that outsiders consider to be divisive. Looking at Bosnia's past reveals that their recent internal division is in fact a product of outside influence. This has occurred in the form of encouraging nationalist fervor in attempts to justify land grabbing within Bosnia's borders. Revealing this truth shows that despite Bosnia's recent past, the centuries of peaceful coexistence that endured within this country stand as a stalwart example for the potential for peace, tolerance, and cooperation in the Balkan region.

While the recent violence in the Balkans has roots that extend centuries into the past, its primary cause can be reduced to conflict between "us" and "them." In order to overcome such division within a community, a restoration of "the moral worth of the Other and reclaiming a mutual recognition of human dignity between victims and perpetrators of inter-communal violence" must occur.<sup>122</sup> Because of this, large-scale peace building efforts that center on governments and agreements among politicians do little to bring about peace within communities. In order to overcome the rift that forms between cultural groups, more concentrated, grassroots peace building efforts are necessary to address the fears and concerns of individuals. It is this potential for peace building that the Gülen Movement strives to cultivate. Their promotion of dialogue and

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<sup>120</sup> Eminov 9

<sup>121</sup> Eminov 6

education in the war-torn Balkans has sown the seed of reconciliation that has the potential to blossom into trust and understanding between Balkan communities formerly inundated by nationalist sentiments against the Other.

### **THE CONFLICT’S EFFECT ON EDUCATION**

As the Gülen Movement’s primary tool for peace building stands as education, it is important to understand the effect that the conflict in the Balkans had on their education systems. The conflict in Kosovo, though not officially a “war” until 1995, resulted from growing tensions between Kosovo Serbians and Albanians. These tensions manifested themselves in many ways, the worst of which was violence. However, the negative effects of this intolerance and hatred can be observed in many other aspects of life as well, not the least of which being Kosovo’s educational system. As Jeton Mehmeti argues, “the education of Kosovo Albanians may be divided into two periods; during Serbian occupation when they were denied proper education and after the war when private universities mushroomed creating studying opportunities.”<sup>123</sup>

When the Serbian regime took over Kosovo in 1989, most Albanians were forced out of the schools – only 25% of the students in schools in 1981 were still in universities by 1990. These problems permeated into primary and secondary schools as well with the mass firing of 14,500 Albanian primary school teachers, 4,000 secondary school teachers,

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<sup>122</sup> Tyler 57

<sup>123</sup> Mehmeti 97

and 862 university teachers.<sup>124</sup> In order to continue their education, students and teachers were forced to retreat into the privacy of homes. Some students insisted on continuing their studies at the University of Prishtina, but they were under the risk of being arrested by Serbian police.

These issues of unequal and improper education become all the more pressing when it is considered that Kosovo is one of the youngest countries in the world with 70% of its population under the age of 30, and 50% below the age of 25.<sup>125</sup> With such a large population of young people, the availability of education in Kosovo should have been increasing rather than being dramatically reduced as it was during Serbian control. Such a need for educational institutions resulted in the ballooning of private universities, where the Ministry of Education provided licenses for 30 private universities in the years of 2001 to 2008.<sup>126</sup> Many of these institutions came in the form of international schools. One such school is the renowned Turkish school, Mehmet Akif.<sup>127</sup> This school, unique in that it teaches in English and prepares its students for future success in good universities, has since expanded to three campuses.

#### **CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN THE BALKANS**

Living through the experience of the violent struggle between leftists and nationalists in Turkey, as well as Kurdish terrorist fights against the Turkish government,

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<sup>124</sup> Memeti 98

<sup>125</sup> Mehmeti 99

<sup>126</sup> *ibid*

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*

Fethullah Gülen has firsthand knowledge of civil unrest and violence.<sup>128</sup> Despite such violence that had a hold on much of the nation, Gülen always remained an unbiased advocate for peace and reconciliation. Even in the face of death threats, Gülen is recorded saying “If I am assassinated, despite all your angers, I ask you to bury my body and seek for order, peace and love in our society. Regardless of what happens; we believers should be representatives of love and security.”<sup>129</sup>

These values of peace and reconciliation have extended well beyond the borders of Turkey in the form of diverse Gülen-inspired schools. Nowhere are their goals of bringing people together more ambitious than in “areas where ethnic and religious conflicts are escalating, such as Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Philippines, Banda Aceh, Northern Iraq, and Southern Turkey.”<sup>130</sup> These institutions provide an environment devoid of strife and hatred where individuals at odds with each other can find common ground and cultivate constructive dialogue. This process may be no more impressive than it is in Albania, where “during the conflict between Albanians and Serbs, both sides would bring their children to the school as a haven of peace in order to deter their involvement in such a conflict.”<sup>131</sup>

In transitional societies such as in the Balkans, education is extremely important. Students will become citizens and will be of the most service to their developing country if they are equipped with sound reasoning abilities, knowledge of the sciences, and well

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<sup>128</sup> Sartioprak 422

<sup>129</sup> Sartioprak 423

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*

<sup>131</sup> *ibid*

thought-out ethical values. The Mehmet Akif school, established in 1993, provides these tools for its students as it is a school inspired by the Gülen Movement. These educational institutions are schools that follow the state curriculum. The idea is to create individuals steeped in ethical values and they are also well educated in all branches of contemporary knowledge and science. Such a balanced education will help in creating a generation which will help shape the modern society.<sup>132</sup>

The Mehmet Akif stands as a stalwart example of the Gülen Movement in action. The guiding belief behind the establishment of Gülen-inspired schools in areas ripe with conflict and civil unrest is that “the road to social justice is paved with adequate, universal education, for only this will give people sufficient understanding and tolerance to respect the rights of others.”<sup>133</sup> In other words, “if people are properly educated to think for themselves and to espouse the positive values of social justice, human rights and tolerance, they will be able to be agents of change to implement these beneficial goals.”<sup>134</sup> If a school merely aims to teach students the skills that they need for employment rather than also encouraging altruistic values, then social progress will never be made. Students without some greater social consciousness will fail to grasp their position as members of a global community and will prefer to concentrate on goals for material success alone. As Gülen argues, “when [people] are left with no ideals or aims, they become reduced to the condition of animated corpses, showing no signs of distinctively human life...Just as an inactive organ becomes atrophied, and a tool which

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<sup>132</sup> Mehmeti 100

<sup>133</sup> Michel 5

<sup>134</sup> *ibid*

is not in use becomes rusty, so aimless generations will eventually waste away because they lack ideals and aims.”<sup>135</sup>

Another powerful example of the Movement’s contributions to peace building in the Balkans comes from the formerly besieged city of Sarajevo. In 1994, Turkish volunteers were smuggled into the city via an underground tunnel in order to promote peace through trust building activities and meetings with city officials and local clergy about the development of Gülen-inspired schools in the city.<sup>136</sup> <sup>137</sup>The first Gülen-inspired high school, the Burc School, opened two years later in 1996, but “local insecurities, segregation, and distrust remained obstacles for attracting students from the local communities.”<sup>138</sup> Despite apprehension from members of the community, this school proved to produce some of the most successful students in the region, especially in the areas of math and science. This academic success was achieved despite being “one of the first private schools open to Bosnian, Serbs, and Croatsians” in a city where segregation of these different groups was common in the educational system.<sup>139</sup>

In the years since the opening of the Burch School in 1996, Gülen-inspired institutions in Sarajevo have expanded to one primary school, three high schools, and one university.<sup>140</sup> In all of these institutions, Gülen’s values of empathy, holistic education,

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<sup>135</sup> *ibid*

<sup>136</sup> Tyler 67

<sup>137</sup> Danismaz 20

<sup>138</sup> Tyler 68

<sup>139</sup> *ibid*

<sup>140</sup> *ibid*



and cross-cultural dialogue are all implicit in the curriculum. While the efforts of these schools have yet to result in widespread tolerance in the city, discernible progress has been seen in the graduates of these institutions. The potential for long term peace building will only increase as the schools continue to grow and become accepted within their communities.

Similar to these institutions, as it is inspired by Gülen's views, the International Burch University was established in 2008 in Sarajevo by Turkish business people and advocates of the Gülen Movement.<sup>141</sup> With a population of 520 Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian students, the university's "inter-communal cooperation for the purposes of higher education will help counter polarizing attitudes and foster compatible goals and collaborative projects that reinforce mutual respect."<sup>142</sup> Though larger-scale peace and tolerance is yet to be achieved in the region, the reality that institutions such as IBU exist where Bosnians, Serbs and Croats participate together in courses and labs stands as a shining example of the potential for peace and progress that has come from the efforts of the Gülen Movement.

The Mehmet Akif School in Kosovo has already been discussed. This institution shares in the same type of small-scale but inspirational progress toward peace that is seen in the Gülen-inspired schools of Sarajevo. Additionally, the Gülen Movement has also been responsible for the successful creation of the Mehmet Akif school (1993), the

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<sup>141</sup> Kaplan

<sup>142</sup> Tyler 69

Turgut Ozal School (1997), and Epoka University (2007) in Albania.<sup>143</sup> Gülen argues that the key to finding peace between groups at odds with each other lies in “respecting all differences, considering these differences to be part of our nature and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences.”<sup>144</sup> However, respecting others’ differences is often easier said than done. In order for this to actually occur, there must be some safe and nurturing environment that is conducive to tolerance and dialogue. These schools provide just this type of environment for students from conflicting backgrounds.

### **IMPROVING FUTURE INQUIRY**

There are not many studies in this area. Most inquiries made into the Gülen Movement concentrate more on Gülen’s writings and ideals than on the real-world effect that these ideals have on bringing peace to our world. Because of this, most information available on this subject deals with the hypothetical and the potential that exists within the Gülen Movement for encouraging universal peace but presents few actual examples of this progress being made. However, Gülen-inspired schools are present in many regions around the world that are ripe with intercultural conflict – the Balkans is merely one example. Similar actions of the Gülen Movement have been observed in regions such as northern Iraq, north and central Africa, Pakistan, and the Philippines. In the interest of identifying and developing the best possible peace building effort, it would be beneficial to compare the actions, successes and failures of efforts of the Gülen Movement in regions that are suffering from the same type of intercultural conflict and intolerance. As

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<sup>143</sup> Kaplan

<sup>144</sup> Akyol 46

the Gülen Movement is but a loose affiliation of like-minded activists, investigating the differences and similarities present in different regions and compiling this information in one place could do much to uncover the most successful and least successful aspects of the Gülen Movement in overcoming such conflicts. However, a new process and standard for inquiry must first become the norm before discernible progress in made toward better understanding the actions of the Gülen Movement.

The work *A Civilian Response to Ethno-Religious Conflict: The Gülen Movement in Southeast Turkey* by Mehmet Kalyoncu provides a counter example to other inquires into the Gülen Movement that fail to uncover examples and reasons for its success. Kalyoncu explains that the diversity and geographic and conceptual breadth of activity found within the Gülen Movement results in difficulty in making generalizations about their actions. In order to mitigate these obstacles in analyzing the Movement, Kalyoncu chose to concentrate on the Movement in Mardin, “the city of seven languages and seven religions.” Mardin was chosen because of “the city’s resemblance to the majority of the regions across the world which suffer ethno-religious conflicts.”<sup>145</sup> Kalyoncu also agrees that little scholarly work has been invested into the Gülen Movement outside of summaries of Gülen’s teachings and hopes to encourage and provide an example of the direction in which scholarly inquiry into the Movement should move.

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<sup>145</sup> Kalyoncu viii

Like other investigations of the Gülen Movement, Kalyoncu begins by outlining the values and goals of the Movement and continues by reviewing existing literature about Gülen – emphasis is placed on the lack of discussion available about the process and examples of accomplishing goals within the Gülen Movement. Also similar to other available literature, Kalyoncu proceeds to outline the writings and ideals of Fethullah Gülen and stresses which teachings have contributed most to the development of the Movement. Moving forward, focus turns to Mardin where the history, development and present state of the Movement is presented. Here we see Kalyoncu reaching beyond the scope of his peers who have also presented works about Gülen. The definitive difference between Kalyoncu's approach and the methods of others is his heavy use of personal accounts from individuals living in Mardin who have been affected by the Gülen Movement. Just as the Movement is a grassroots campaign that strives to improve the individual, and thus the community, inquiries into the actions and effects of the Movement should also be made at the personal level. Kalyoncu shows that in order to discern any progress being made by the efforts of Gülen Movement volunteers, it does not help to view entire cities or countries from afar. The progress that is being made is occurring in the hearts and minds of individuals who are being transformed into powerful advocates for dialogue, tolerance and peace.

In light of this investigation into the way that most of academia approaches the Gülen Movement, it is clear that a change must occur if there is to be any hope of uncovering its methods and specific practices. In order to best understand and appreciate the progress that is being made in the Balkans, further investigation must be made at a

personal level among inhabitants of the Balkan region that have been affected by efforts of Gülen Movement volunteers and educators. Allowing these individuals' voices be heard stands as the first step in understanding and expanding the positive influence that the Gülen Movement has already had within their communities.

In such a study, a similar approach to that used by Kalyoncu could be followed to understand the effect of Gülen Movement in Balkans. By interviewing Gülen Movement volunteers, Gülen-inspired school alumni and students, parents of these students, as well as individuals who are uninformed about or even opposed to Gülen Movement involvement in the region stand as valuable resources that have remained underutilized. If answers are given to questions such as “How have your assumptions about [Albanians, Croatians, Christians, Muslims, Serbians, Jews, etc.] changed?” and “What are some examples of positive or negative experiences you have had as a result of your involvement with the Gülen Movement/Schools?” and “What changes have you witnessed within your community as a result of the presence of Gülen Movement volunteers and schools?” a better understanding of the Gülen Movement will begin to develop. In addition to this improved understanding, the history of the Gülen Movement's affiliated organizations will be documented, which will provide other regions with a framework and timetable for expected progress. Also, a survey of graduates of the Gülen-inspired schools would not only provide valuable insight into issues in the Balkans, but their distribution throughout and positions within the community would also serve as examples for how these schools have actually shaped the lives of individuals as well as their community.

While the lack of strong affiliation and communication among different segments of the Gülen Movement has been praised as one of its strengths in allowing flexibility and enabling volunteers to provide site-specific services and motivations, giving a more prominent voice to the individuals affected by the Movement will only improve its effectiveness. Sharing these experiences will provide examples of effective peace building methods, increase awareness of the positive influence of the Gülen Movement, and create the potential for the development of a global community through dialogue of individuals living in regions plagued with intercultural conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

While intercultural tension and distrust remains a defining feature of life in the Balkans, the efforts of the Gülen Movement have unarguably resulted in positive change in the lives of hundreds of individuals. As their reputation and breadth of activity continues to spread across the region, so too will peace building efforts touch the lives of more and more people. It is in this capacity that discernible and meaningful progress toward peace is made at the personal level. The Gülen Movement's grassroots approach has proven more effective in bringing conflicting groups into dialogue and cooperation than could ever be possible in the symbolic signing of national peace treaties. However, in order to develop a complete understanding of the progress that is being made in the region, further work must be done in the form of obtaining actual accounts of the Movement's affect on individuals. In keeping with the Gülen Movement's method of enacting change, it is through this grassroots approach to inquiry that a clearer picture will form of the methods that are most effective in moving the peace process forward.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion of the Study**

The history of the Balkans and the conflict which erupted there is one of tragedy. A region so diverse in culture, ideas and people, serving as a connection between East and West, does not only stand as an example of the potential some areas of the world have in generating equally diverse cultures, but it can also serve as an example of the dangers of outside forces attempting to seize that potential. It should be mentioned that the diversity of the region in itself was not the cause of the conflict, nor the violence that occurred there.

The term nationalism is a loaded term. Fascism, racism, and particularly notions of colonialism have changed its meaning and presented it in the mainstream as an controlling ideological apparatus. Since WWII, the term nationalism and its definition haven't literally changed, but it has evolved as technological advancements develop exponentially and drastically change the economic and political landscape. Modern nationalism is tied to international politics and modern warfare. Before, when war consisted of a physical landscape and soldiers on the ground fighting for the earth beneath their feet, expanding a nation meant the acquisition of land. Now, economic tools, patent laws and property rights have changed the way nations conduct themselves.

The previous chapters have addressed the issues which arise in a region that has a long history of cultural diversity and conflict. Some of the most influential factors include nationalism, capitalism, racism, fascism, war, invasion, imperialism, colonialism,



occupation, and how all of these issues are connected and intersect each other. The history of the Balkans is paradoxical: a region praised for its diversity, also thrown into violence fueled by that same diversity. However, diversity in itself was not a cause of conflict. Much like economic, political and racial divisions should be seen as separate causes, interweaving lines of causality all contributing to violence and intolerance, the rich cultural diversity in the Balkans can be seen as simultaneously encouraging division of people, while at the same time, a unifying aspect of the region.

The history presented in this work shows how the region became unstable through the rise of imperialism, colonialism, and these systems' resultant promotion of nationalism. As the world experienced a newfound interconnectedness of ideas, dissemination of these alternate ideals was soon to follow. As for economic factors, trade routes and port cities became nodes of economic exchange, and those in power understood that to retain and increase power, authority over these areas would be crucial. The Balkans stand as an example of a region that experienced these converging forces of political authority and economic power; but, in order for these powers to exert control, first they needed to win consent.

The Balkans had been a land of peaceful diversity, both religious and cultural, until the ideologies of the West, in particular those of nationalism, negatively impacted the region, characterized by discouraging diversity and promotion of notions of ethnic superiority. Anthony D. Smith defines Nationalism as “an ideology that places the nation at the center of its concerns and seeks to promote the nation’s well-being...[specifically] furthering national autonomy, national unity and national identity,” but truthfully, it is

impossible to describe nationalism with a single definition because each interpretation of nationalism relies on a specific national identity, which, as seen in this collection, may shift even within a same nation and time period. It may even differ from group to group within the same country or region.

Among political ideologies, nationalism is nearly unmatched in terms of power and popular appeal. Few conceptual symbols have had such resilience and influence throughout history. But nationalism goes beyond the ideological and into the realm of shared and developing culture. According with the historian Anthony D. Smith, Nationalism is an ideology which is centered on the nation and seeks to promote the nation's well-being, furthering a national autonomy, national unity and national identity. This national identity varies with time, location and people making it a very ambiguous concept open to interpretation. Thus allowing for nationalism to take on sharply different meanings even within the same country.

There are four paradigmatic approaches to the study of nationalism: modernism, perennialism, primordialism, and ethno-symbolism. Modernism asserts that nationalism has grown in political and social spheres since the French Revolution and as an effort to improve the nation's power and welfare. Perennialists fall into two camps, one arguing that some nations can trace their political, ethnic, or cultural roots back hundreds or thousands of years, and the other arguing that the concept of nationhood has existed for even longer still. This view allowed for the development of a form of social evolution, whereby different nations competed with each other over time. Primordialists view nationalism as a continuation of the ancient tendency for humans to form cooperative

groups, often based on common ancestry and kinship. Ethno-symbolism places a special importance on the common masses and their shared culture. (This one also applies to an individual's relationship to the state because of his or her beliefs, beliefs that can be altered through education). Ethno-symbolism emphasizes the sentiments, values, myths, and collective history held subjectively by a particular people. It also sustains the problem of what exactly appeals to people about nationalism and in particular its ties to ethnic history, providing means to understand what draws individuals to these ideas and that those ideas can be changed through education.

The different currents of nationalism today still lead to violence and strife between ethnic and national groups. To understand the issue we need to understand violence. Slavoj Žižek identifies three variations of violence: subjective, objective, and systemic. Subjective violence includes direct, physical violence such as terrorist or criminal acts. Objective violence uses symbolic or political structures to harm individuals or groups, and includes the application of racism or discriminatory practices. Systemic violence, the least recognized but most damaging form, can only be seen in the end results of economic and political systems. Žižek argues Western capitalism and media have created a new wave of fundamental systemic violence that is no longer attributable to concrete individuals. This form of violence is often perpetrated on the grounds of a nationalist agenda and has been proven to be the most dangerous form of violence since the rise of nationalism in the late 18th century. At its most extreme, systemic violence against a particular group can combine with nationalist fervor in the form of ethnic cleansing.

The nationalism in the Balkans is not the result of a national awakening, but the consequence of an advancement in education and rationalism that came from western Enlightenment ideology. This evolution of knowledge forced the people from the Balkans to create a linguistic division that was later perpetuated by statewide education systems. A combination of Social Darwinism and nationalism was used to justify the invasions of foreign lands and the subjugation of millions by western powers. Under the premises of Social Darwinism and the belief of doing everything possible for the betterment of the mother country, foreign lands were tapped for natural resources, as trade routes and alliances formed to ensure continued national prosperity.

During World War II, the Axis powers successfully invaded large swaths of the Balkans, splitting the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and melding the concept of nationalism with that of racism and fascism. King Alexander I tried to stifle this conflict by outlawing political parties based on national or ethnic differences, which further galvanized Croatian youth, who ended up forming the fascist Ustasa movement that would later commit numerous acts of genocide. In response to the Axis invasion, a strong resistance led by Josip Tito was formed. As Yugoslavia broke down into Serbian and Croatian, the Serbians rallied behind Slobodan Milosevic who claimed that their status within the region was underrepresented. Yugoslavian military, supported by Milosivic, began to coordinate with some Bosnian Serbs to form a group in Bosnia, the Vojska Republike Srpske (VRS). Through this group they started an explicit policy of displacing Bosnian Croats and Muslims by forcing them from their homes and into separate geographical areas designated by ethnicity. Bosnian Croatians turned against the Bosnian army and

Bosnian Muslims, taking territory from them as well as defending territory from VRS. However, the Bosnian Croats ended up signing a ceasefire with the Bosnian Muslims known as the Washington Agreement. With a ceasefire imminent, Bosnian Muslims were the victims of final pushes for territory by VRS. Shortly thereafter, the VRS negotiated a ceasefire through the Dayton agreement.

As we've seen throughout this collection, ethno-symbolism might provide insight into how nationalist forms of violence are perpetuated and used to motivate violence, therefore ethno-symbolism may help us understand this manipulation of public opinion and help us find a way to reverse it. The selective memory encouraged in Yugoslavia in Tito's era was one of the main factors that contributed to the explosion of intercultural violence in the region. The tragic history of post-Tito regime Yugoslavia provides an example of the negative impact on the belief of nationalism in the form of cultural supremacy.

Seemingly endless years of violence and conflict within the Yugoslavian region did much to legitimize war as a cultural symbol. Following WWII, the Communist Party sought to consolidate their rule through a "selective memory" approach, aiming to craft the country's collective memory in such a way as to portray the Communist Party as the protector of the region, and the educational system was the ideal system to promote the Country's new "history". This construction of a tailored "history" resulted primarily in two unfavorable effects. First, the new history reduced WWII conflict into a "us vs. them" conflict between revolutionaries (good) and counterrevolutionaries (evil). Second,

in an attempt to encourage class-based unity, the ruling party in Tito's era chose to ignore Yugoslavia's cultural diversity.

The Yugoslavian government of the late 80s brought the ideas of nationalism and ethnicity to the Balkans as a key component of identity, blurring the line between ethnic groups, nations, and peoples. As Yugoslavia broke down into Serbian and Croatian regions in the late 80s and early 90s, nationalist rhetoric began to increase on both sides. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, Croats and Serbs manipulated history books and news reports to build up the idea of victimization by the other side, further developing their national identities in opposition to one another. This would lead to the worst manifestation of subjective violence: genocide.

To Hoepken, the influence that Yugoslavia's curriculum had in enabling intercultural violence can be traced back to two primary consequences of this educational approach: (1) glorification of the idea of sacrificing one's life for what they believe in, and (2) a repression of growing ethnic disputes in the country. Tito managed to maintain control, but after his death the tensions within the country began to break apart, setting the stage for the Bosnian war. After ignoring the country's Croatian-Serbian tensions, the ethnic conflict erupted in violence in the 1990s. This region became so infamous for its inter-cultural conflict that the term "Balkanization" came to describe the phenomenon where identity-based division, distrust and violence lead to the fragmentation of a community.

The roots of the violence in the Balkans boils down to the apprehensive relationship between ethnic groups and the beliefs of superiority and that they should prove that superiority for the glory of the mother country. In order to overcome such division within a community, a restoration of the human dignity between victims and perpetrators of the violence must occur.

Living through the experience of the violent struggle between leftists and nationalists in Turkey, Fethullah Gülen, a unique Islamic scholar, has firsthand knowledge of civil unrest and violence and promotes values of peace and reconciliation that have extended well beyond the borders of Turkey in the form of diverse Gülen-inspired schools. Just as nationalism was developed through education, a new doctrine, more tolerant of others that promotes human values can be taught in the same way. If a school merely aims to teach students the skills that they need for employment rather than also encouraging altruistic values, then social progress will never be made. Students without some greater social consciousness will fail to grasp their position as members of a global community and will prefer to concentrate on goals for material success alone.

Looking at the region's past reveals that the Balkans' internal division is in fact a product of outside influence. This occurred in the form of encouraging nationalist fervor in attempts to justify land grabbing within Bosnia's borders. In order to overcome such division within a community, a restoration of peace and values needs to take place, and here is where the Gülen Movement could have an important impact. One of the Movement's most important goals is the promotion of proper education. Gülen believes that the path to peaceful coexistence is for future generations to learn the benefits of

tolerance, dialogue and respect for the each other, because the establishment of justice has been hindered not only by the lack of an integral education, but also the lack of the recognition of human rights and the acceptance of others.

In transitional societies, such as in the Balkans, education is extremely important due to the fact that in order to overcome the rift that forms between cultural groups, peace building efforts are necessary to address the fears and concerns of individuals. It is this potential for peace building that the Gülen Movement strives to cultivate, keeping in mind that students are the future and will be of the most service to their developing country if they are equipped with sound reasoning, knowledge and values. Success stories have shown that schools inspired by the Gülen Movement provide just this type of environment for students from conflicting backgrounds to come together and learn to grow in an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

History has shown us that ideology and propaganda are powerful tools for controlling populations. Encouraging hatred and fear have been proven as methods of unifying a particular ideology against another ideology. The destruction and distorting of educational systems presents another effective method of promoting ideologies of hatred, intolerance and racism, able to fester in the minds of a generation. However, as much as close-mindedness and restrictions on dialogue and conversation are the problem, solutions lie in open-mindedness and intercultural dialogue. The Gülen Movement proposes a promising alternative and recourse for the turmoil that has existed not only in the Balkans, but also in similar parts of the world that are stricken with the same imperialism, nationalism, racism and distortion of educational systems. The Gülen



Movement proposes that the solution to the inter-cultural conflict resulting from colonialism and nationalism is education, empathy, open dialogue and tolerance.

Though larger-scale peace and tolerance is yet to be achieved in the region, the reality that institutions such as International Burch University in Sarajevo exist where Bosnians, Serbs and Croats participate together in courses and labs stands as a shining example of the potential for peace and progress.

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